PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

SEPTEMBER 2010

WORLD'S FIRST HANDS-ON

Metal Gear Solid: Rising
Raiden makes the cut

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit
Fast, furious, fun!

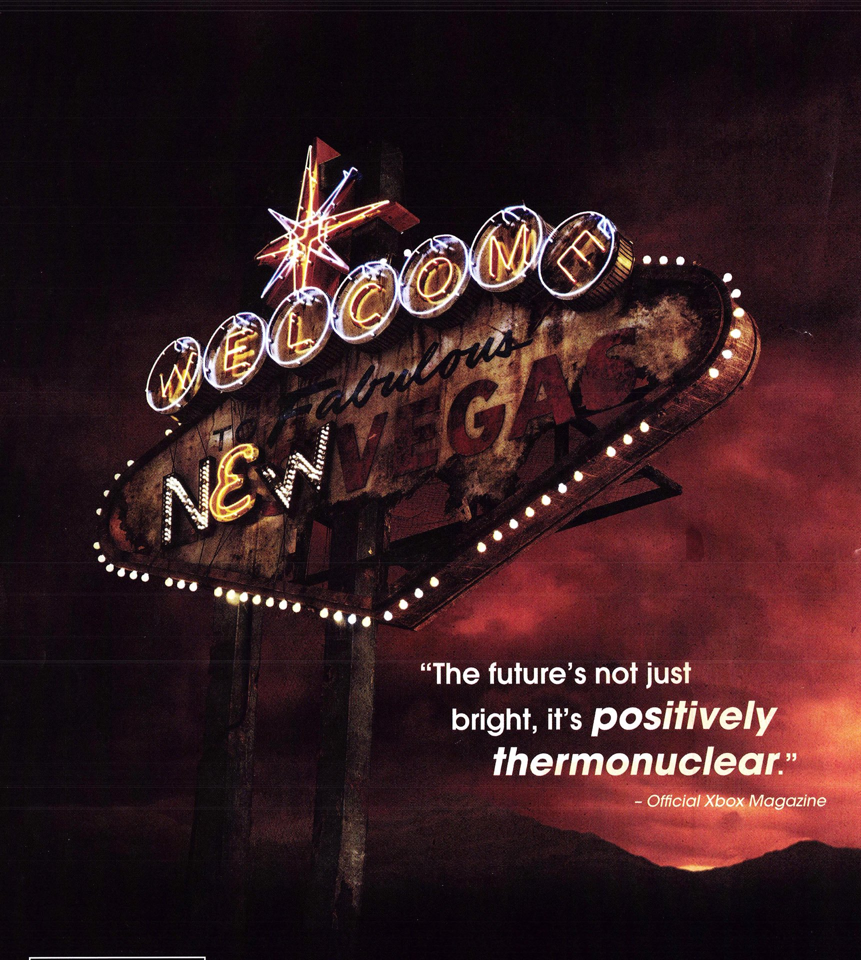
PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 36 (September 2010)

RAGE

THE BEST-LOOKING PS3 SHOOTER!
BUT HOW DOES IT PLAY?

YOU DO THE MATH
100 GAMES 24 HOURS!

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION



"The future's not just bright, it's ***positively thermonuclear.***"

– Official Xbox Magazine

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Games for Windows XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PS3 PlayStation 3 PlayStation Network

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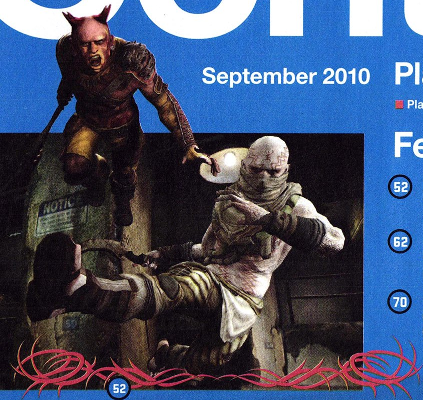

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One man. One day. One hundred games. Zero pants.

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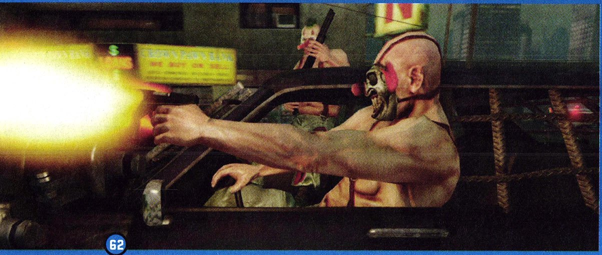

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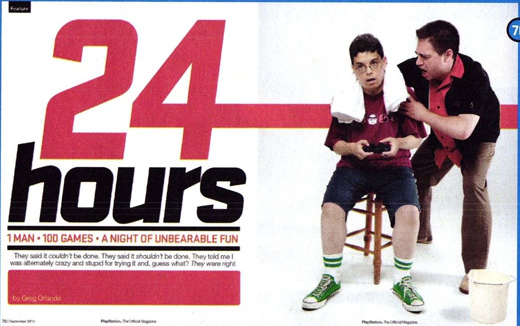

Feature

24 hours

1 MAN • 100 GAMES • A NIGHT OF UNBEARABLE FUN

They said it *couldn't* be done. They said it *shouldn't* be done. They told me I was alternately crazy and stupid for trying it and, guess what? *They were right.*

by Greg Orlando

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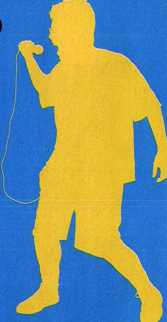

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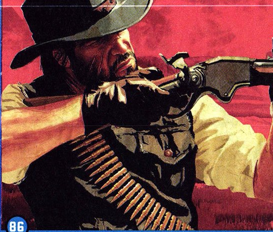
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➔ New Friends

Once upon a time, id Software was among the greatest PC developers in the world. These were the guys who *created* the first-person shooter, and then they built some of the best engines upon which to offer up newer, better FPSes. *Wolfenstein, Doom, Quake*—all the stuff of legend.

But as PC gaming gave way to console dominance, id Software found itself almost forgotten—even unknown to many PlayStation-only gamers. That's because none of id's games were ever built for the PlayStation, and the ports we got were often late and in lesser condition.

Consider *Rage* id's coming out party on the PS3. Their first new franchise in years, *Rage* is exactly what id does best: ultra-refined gameplay married to incredible graphics. When it comes to the game itself, innovation has given way to iteration; the company that created the FPS isn't trying to redefine its beloved genre, but to give us the very best it can offer. And it's all being delivered via the developer's "id Tech 5" engine, and coded directly for the PS3 so *Rage* can fully harness the massive power of our favorite system.

But all that tech talk is irrelevant compared with my gut reaction when I first saw *Rage.* Yes, it was gorgeous—among the best-looking games I've ever seen. And yes, it looked like a tight, fun experience. But the overwhelming feeling I was left with? Utter delight. Even in my initial hands-off demo, I felt this almost uncontrollable urge to grab the DualShock and jump right in. It's tough to describe why other than to say that even at that early stage of development, *Rage* already looked so incredibly inviting, with a quality and clarity that seemed to scream "Play me!"

Which is exactly what we did on our trip down to Mesquite, Texas, to visit with id and be the first outlet in the known universe to play their game. Not only is *Rage* shaping up to be just what I had hoped for, but I've got some great new friends too. As will all of you when *Rage* releases sometime next year.

GARY

Gary Steinman | Editor in Chief

www.twitter.com/TinyManRages

➔ Our intrepid editor Gary is sandwiched between two of the smartest guys in the biz: id Software's Tim Willits (left) and Matt Hooper.

The Team ➘

GARY STEINMAN

EDITOR IN CHIEF

It takes a nation of millions to hold us back, and a nation of one under supereditor Gary Steinman to ensure, in perpetuity: love, smiles, and the possibility of afternoon delight, by which we mean donuts with sprinkles.

NOW PLAYING: *Rage, Joe Danger, Split/Second, MotorStorm: Pacific Rift*

GREG ORLANDO

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Is it true kittens climb trees just to be rescued by the former Elvis-impersonator impersonator Greg Orlando? Can he really wave his hand and turn cheese into "cheez?" The answer, obviously, is maybe. Or not.

NOW PLAYING: *DeathSpank, AAA: Heroes Del Ring, Naughty Bear*

KEN BOUSQUET

ART DIRECTOR

Art is, like, here. But our design guru Ken Bousquet is like 25 feet above that. And that's without having to stand on the intern—which Ken likes to do a lot. It's just good fun. Just not for the intern.

NOW PLAYING: *2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa, Split/Second*

ROGER BURCHILL

MANAGING EDITOR

Editing juggernaut Roger Burchill is oftentimes seen with a red pen in one hand, beautifully rewritten copy in another, and a rainbow in the third. He dearly loves to love, and that's why we love him dearly.

NOW PLAYING: *LEGO Harry Potter, Blur, Split/Second*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Boy band Boyz With Hatz dreamboat Scott Butterworth reminds us all that it's *403* blue M&Ms in a brandy snifter or else someone's not going on stage and these silky smooth jams will need to rock themselves.

NOW PLAYING: *Rock Band 3, Marvel vs. Capcom 3, Split/Second*

THE DAVID MURPHY

EDITORIAL INTERN

In a world where misery rests in the heart of forgetfulness, one man fought the system, defied the odds, and made sure that hope damn well floats. And intern Daniel "David" Murphy knew a guy who knew that guy's brother.

NOW PLAYING: *Gundemonium, Front Mission Evolved, Naughty Bear*

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

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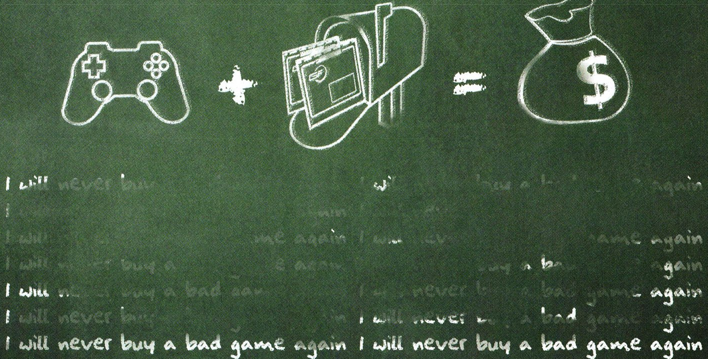
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Say good night...of the living dead?
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Cutting Edge

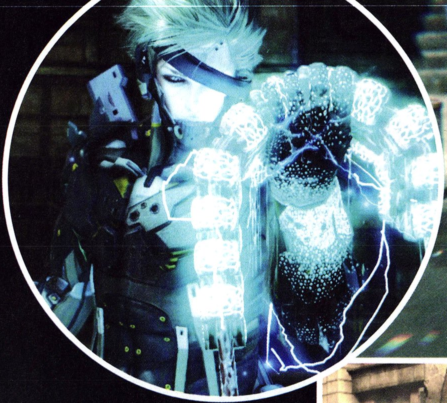
Exclusive *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* details straight from the creators

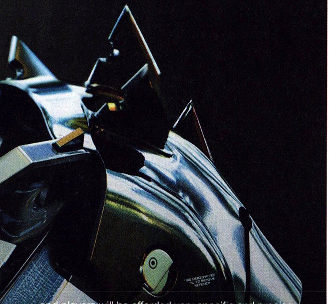
After a full year of waiting, *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* has finally resurfaced… and with style. A recently released trailer shows a cybernetically enhanced Raiden effortlessly slicing straight through absolutely everything (and everyone) in his path with what has to be the world's sharpest katana. After seeing the game in action, we just had to know more. Fortunately, Konami invited us to a top-secret roundtable with the game's director Mineshi Kimura and creative producer Shigenobu Matsuyama who revealed many *Rising* details for the first time anywhere.

Kimura and Matsuyama framed the game not as "a side story or a spin off" but as a new branch of the *Metal Gear* franchise that will stand alongside the traditional stealth games, which remain firmly under *Metal Gear Solid* creator Hideo Kojima's purview. They also implied *Rising* could be the first of several new *Metal Gear* games, stating, "We are planning…to have *Rising* almost as a standard going forward, so there is *Metal Gear Solid* and *Rising* going back and forth in the future."

Naturally, *Rising*—with its acrobatic movement and seriously sharp swords—will offer an experience unlike that of any previous *Metal Gear* game. "*[Rising]* will be more purely action-oriented. Basically it will be a katana sword action fighting game. So you'll have fun just slicing and cutting and, you know, fast-paced action. That's what we're concentrating on."

At the same time, however, "the play style will be more in-depth than just cutting and killing,"





and players will be afforded very specific and precise degree of control over the blade. "As you saw in the trailer, we can kind of angle how we want to cut…in very specific detail. This is already in our prototype, and we can cut anything, from buildings to everything."

Despite this unique focus, *Rising* will still be tied to the larger *Metal Gear* series, most notably in the narrative space. Chronologically, the game takes place between *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* and *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots,* although Kimura stated players wouldn't necessarily have to know either game in order to appreciate *Rising.* "The storytelling part is a thing that [Kojima's] work is famous for, and *Rising* of course will have a story behind it. However, it will be more of a backstory to playing the game. We will have a high-quality story behind the game even though it's more about having pure fun in the action."

↘ The developers are still uncertain as to whether *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* will be a solo adventure or multiplayer affair.

PlayStation®Plus

2 PSN + PS Plus = PSN^2?

Sony's recently announced PlayStation Plus won't replace the existing free-to-play PSN, but it will certainly augment it. The fee-based service allows subscribers access to a host of new features, but is it worth it? PTOM investigates the pluses and minuses of PlayStation Plus.

Do the Math

[Box 1.]

What It Costs

PlayStation Plus offers two subscription plans for North American PlayStation owners. A three-month subscription can be had for $17.99 and a year's worth of service costs $49.99.

+

[Box 2.]

What You Get

FREE GAMES AND SHOWS At launch, Plus offered the PSN version of *WipEout HD;* games *Fieldrunners, Age of Zombies,* and *Rally Cross;* a trial version of *inFamous* (available for a one-hour playtest); and episodes of the gaming show Qore.

DISCOUNTS ON GAMES Subscribers will receive up to 50 percent discounts on PlayStation Store titles.

GAME TRIALS PlayStation Plus subscribers will be able to sample select games before purchasing them. Typically, the trial period will last one hour.

EXTRAS Customized themes and avatars will be made available to subscribers.

AUTOMATIC DOWNLOADS Schedule downloads for game updates and system upgrades, and the system handles the rest.

EARLY ACCESS TO GAMES Plus subscribers will see lots of content before regular PSN users will.

Sub-total 1.

-

[Box 3.]

What You Don't Get

CROSS GAME VOICE CHAT Sony realizes it's important, but this is not currently a PlayStation Plus feature.

FREE GAMES FOREVER Once a person's subscription lapses, he loses access to all the free titles he's downloaded through Plus.

Subtract Box 3. from Sub-total 1.

[Sum A.]

It's Worth It For

HARDCORE GAMERS who want to revisit PlayStation classics.

PEOPLE WHO CAN'T WAIT for the latest demos or want early beta test entrance.

ANYONE WHO HATES it when a system update loading screen appears.

BARGAIN HUNTERS As of press time, Sony was offering three free months of Plus service for anyone who signed up for a year's subscription.

Sign up if the math adds up thusly: Box 1 + Box 2 > Box 3.

or

[Sum B.]

It's Not Worth It For

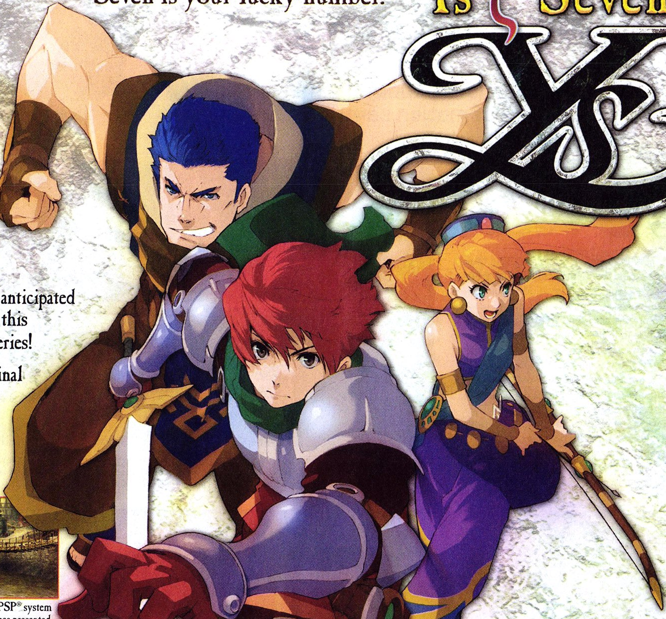
CASUAL GAMERS in love with Sony's free online service.

PEOPLE ON THE FENCE ABOUT PLUS Sony plans to evolve the service, so it's possible the Plus that exists now will be expanded on in the not-too-distant future.

If Box 1 + Box 2 < Box 3, pass on Plus for now.

Seven is your lucky number.

Ys Seven



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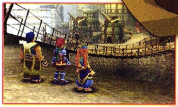

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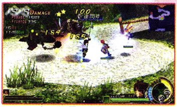
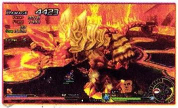
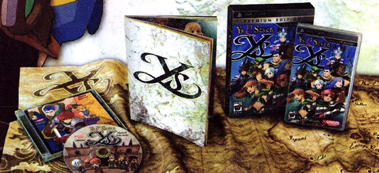


Three-member battle party fighting in real-time on the field map keeps the pace fast and furious.



Epic story of harnessing the Five Great Dragons to save the world spanning over 30 hours of gameplay.



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PSP PlayStation®Portable

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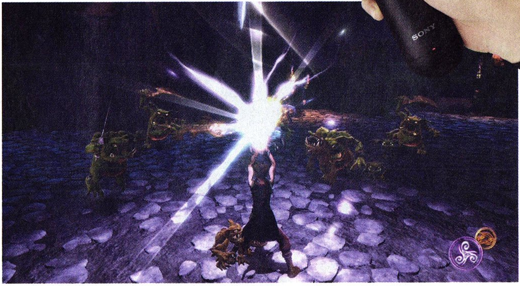
3 Motion Granted

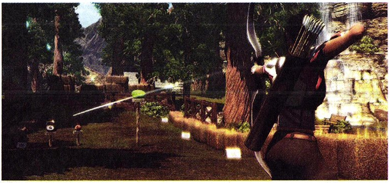
Why we're moved about the present and future of motion control

FIRST MOVE

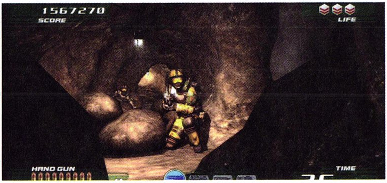
We'll admit it: We were on the fence about Move. We knew it would work, and that it would probably work very well. We understood the upside—casual gamers, non-gaming applications—and we were comfortable with what we thought Move's role would be in the PlayStation universe. But we had no idea how *hardcore* of a gaming device Move would actually be. Yes, Sony had been bigging up the idea that Move is totally legit for the core gamer, but until we dove deep into the launch lineup, we still were a bit reserved. The good news: It not only works, but it works better than we ever thought, and now we can't wait until September 21 when Move launches, along with a solid lineup of great games. Here are five that we're looking forward to most:



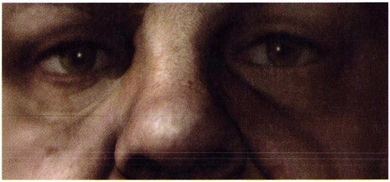
SORCERY Though not available until 2011, this gem showcases how Move can be the centerpiece of the crossover game: something we "borrow" from our kid brother and end up playing until the wee hours of the morn. Casting spells is neat, but we love the little touches like shaking up a potion and having the light pop on when it's ready to drink, then tilting back the controller to quaff our concoction.



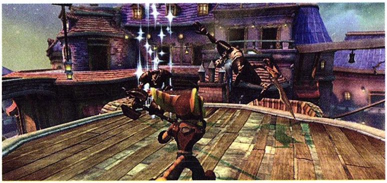
SPORTS CHAMPIONS Yes, this is the obvious one, and yes, it's been done to death on the Wii—but darnit, we had a blast with this collection of six sporting events. Going head to head, Roger schooled Gary in archery, but Gary regained his pride in an epic contest of table tennis. Beach volleyball was supposed to be next, but no one wanted to see us in our swimming trunks…



TIME CRISIS: RAZING STORM *SOCOM 4* might prove that the Move can handle hardcore shooters, but *Time Crisis* is quick, mindless fun. This one is light on strategy, prioritizing mayhem and destruction over dodges and ammo conservation, which means we'll be strafing and sweeping across the screen, spraying our living room with virtual bullets as we blast the world to bits.



HEAVY RAIN If any game was made for Move, this is it. The cinematic masterpiece immersed us in its world with a gesture-based control scheme using the DualShock, and now it's being patched for Move support. Even better: Every motion is being rethought, and the timing of certain sequences is being adjusted to ensure a more comfortable transition to true gesture controls.



HEROES ON THE MOVE All we've seen is a trailer for *Heroes,* but that's all it took. Ratchet, Jak, Clank, Daxter, Sly, Bentley—six of the PlayStation's greatest mascot characters, working together to defeat some as-yet-unknown evil, each with his own set of weapons and attacks. Our one request: co-op, please.

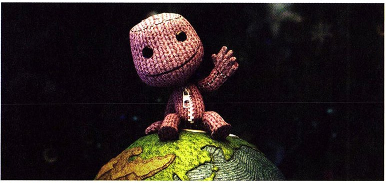
MOVING FORWARD

The first wave of Move games and applications is impressive, but Sony recently gave us a sneak-peek tech-demo of PS Move applications still in development. The most impressive displays utilized 3D and motion control in conjunction with each other. We began to realize the tech's true potential as we shaped, bent, twirled, and otherwise manipulated virtual items that our mind suddenly accepted as tangible objects. An important interactive threshold is about to be crossed and it's sending our imagination into overdrive as we conceive of new gaming applications and experiences. Here are five franchises we'd love to see incorporate a 3D+Move setup:

METAL GEAR SOLID Using Move to aim weapons in *Killzone 3* is a natural first app, but we think 3D+Move could really enhance stealth shooters like *MGS*. Imagine Snake sneaking up behind an enemy, covering his target's mouth with one hand and slitting his throat with a knife in the other. Or how about a bomb-defusing scenario where Snake works on the device by removing panels, then searches for key components and tries to determine which wires to cut as time ticks away? Quick-Time Events are about to become obsolete.

FINAL FANTASY Casting spells in *Sorcery* got us thinking of magical applications for *FF* and other fantasy-themed RPGs and adventures. 3D+Move can make it feel like we're conjuring and casting a fireball—and the ability to transform in-game items on the fly, like say extracting barbs from a broadsword, could offer new and inventive ways to dispatch enemies. Why settle for slicing a head off when we can impale, hook, and slam our victim into wall spikes and other environmental elements?

LORD OF THE RINGS *Sports Champions*' archery event is one of Move's most successful initial implementations. Incorporating character movement via the Navigation controller with PS Eye face-tracking could make for a truly immersive *Lord of the Rings* adventure game as we assume the role of Legolas acrobatically traversing a battlefield, searching for Orcs to dispense with swift, precisely aimed arrow shots.



LITTLEBIGPLANET As technology moves into the third dimension, so might a future *LBP* game. 3D+Move would be an incredibly simple, intuitive, powerful tool for user-created content. Sculpting custom objects and 3D terrain formation could be accomplished by simply swiping, poking, prodding, and stretching the elements using the Move wand. Imagination would no longer be constrained by complex or confusing creation toolsets.

THE LAST GUARDIAN Team ICO's gone silent about *The Last Guardian,* but *EyePet: Move Edition* got us thinking about creature interaction possibilities. Using Move to play with a monkey-Chihuahua is cute and fun, but how epic would it be to interact with *Guardian's* man-eating erne using the same tech? 3D+Move could allow us to affectionately stroke, feed, and otherwise interact with the mammoth creature for an experience that would truly bring the in-game companion to life.

What It Costs

Motion Controller $49.99
Eye Camera $39.99
Navigation Controller $29.99

PlayStation Move bundle $99.99
Includes Motion Controller, PlayStation Eye, *Sports Champions* game, and game demo disc

PlayStation 3 Sports Champion Move Bundle $399.99
Includes PS3, Motion Controller, PlayStation Eye, *Sports Champions* game, and game demo disc

4 MMO Overload

Hands-on with the PS3's "biggest" online games

Final Fantasy XIV

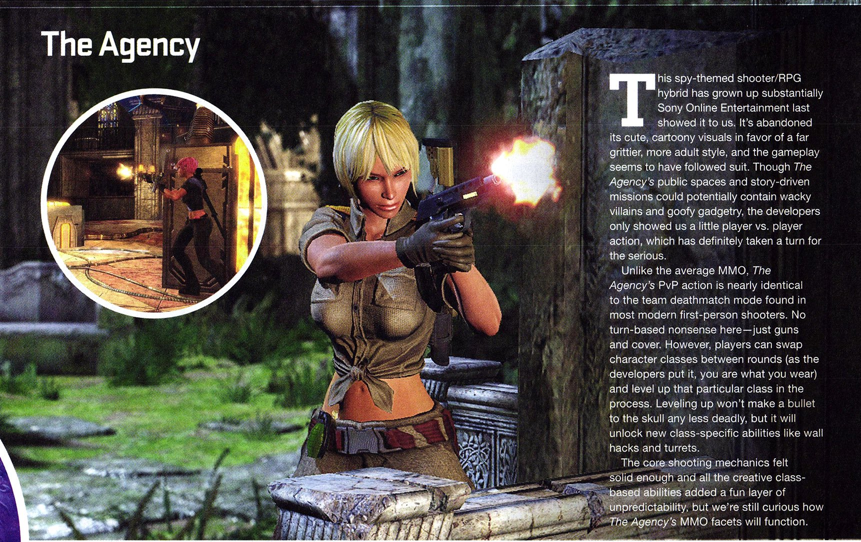
Epic role-playing game *Final Fantasy XIV*—the follow up to Square Enix's last massively multiplayer online RPG, *Final Fantasy XI* on the PS2—transports us to a fantastic realm where "myths become reality" and Tolkien-esque characters populate whimsical environments reminiscent of the more pastoral-themed *Final Fantasy* games like *FFIX* and *FFX.*

During our brief experience playing this March 2011 release, we spawned as a lanky, spear-wielding paladin character in the middle of a majestic field, and after approaching a couple of nearby players and using a contextual menu to add them to our party, we set off in search of…enemy crabs. Not the most glamorous opponents, but it did give us a taste of the open-world quest structure.

We can activate and scale the difficulty of a quest from a contextual menu (see a pattern here?) that pops up when we approach a glowing waypoint in the game world. Similarly, when we choose to "examine" a designated section of the map, enemies begin to spawn, and we once again use a menu to select and attack our opponents. The system's not immediately intuitive but it's also not too complicated, so it should be no sweat with a little practice. Plus, we could at least explore the world in real time. So that's easy.

We also got a quick glimpse of the character creation screen, which showed off five races that loosely resembled humans, elves, (cute) dwarfs, a female-only race of cat people, and a male-only race of gray behemoths. We don't know for certain how deeply customizable characters will be, but we do know that a character's class is determined simply by the items he/she/it has equipped rather than a permanent choice made at the beginning of the game.

The Agency

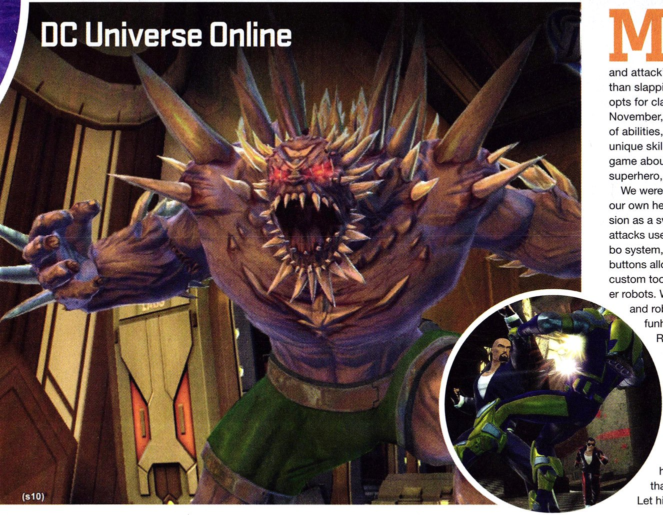


This spy-themed shooter/RPG hybrid has grown up substantially Sony Online Entertainment last showed it to us. It's abandoned its cute, cartoony visuals in favor of a far grittier, more adult style, and the gameplay seems to have followed suit. Though *The Agency's* public spaces and story-driven missions could potentially contain wacky villains and goofy gadgetry, the developers only showed us a little player vs. player action, which has definitely taken a turn for the serious.

Unlike the average MMO, *The Agency's* PvP action is nearly identical to the team deathmatch mode found in most modern first-person shooters. No turn-based nonsense here—just guns and cover. However, players can swap character classes between rounds (as the developers put it, you are what you wear) and level up that particular class in the process. Leveling up won't make a bullet to the skull any less deadly, but it will unlock new class-specific abilities like wall hacks and turrets.

The core shooting mechanics felt solid enough and all the creative class-based abilities added a fun layer of unpredictability, but we're still curious how *The Agency's* MMO facets will function.

DC Universe Online



Much like *The Agency,* Sony Online Entertainment's *DC Universe Online* looks to break from traditional "stand and attack" MMO gameplay, but rather than slapping a gun in our hands, *DCUO* opts for classic beat-'em-up action. This November, players will enjoy a wide range of abilities, from weapons and gadgets to unique skills and superpowers. This is a game about crafting a totally personalized superhero, after all.

We weren't given an opportunity to build our own hero, but we did tackle a solo mission as a sword-wielding acrobat. Basic attacks use the standard two-button combo system, but the D-pad and shoulder buttons allow us to implement up to eight custom tools like grenades and friendly killer robots. We gradually punched, slashed, and robot-ed our way through a dark, funhouse-themed lair, rescued Robin from Harley Quinn, and collected loot and experience for our efforts.

The controls could use a little tweaking, but overall, *DCUO* makes a fine action game—although we're far more excited about the prospect of earning items for our hero and raiding with our friends than we are about rescuing Robin. Let him fend for himself!

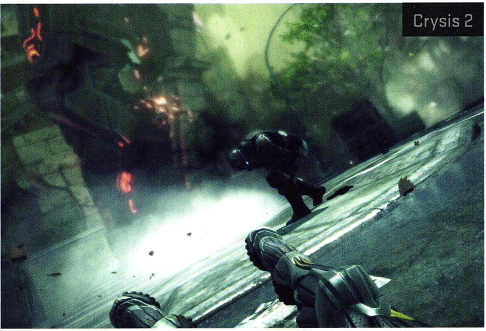
SONY
XBR
SONY

5 PS3D

PlayStation 3 brings videogaming into the third dimension. Welcome to Sony's next big thing.

Right near the top of Sony's priorities list sits 3D gaming, the long promised but until now unrealized technology set to "bring us closer to our games like never before" (as the axiom goes). For Sony, it's a clear line in the sand: PlayStation 3 is currently the only console to embrace stereoscopic 3D gaming, and the technology is one Sony understands as well as any other company. Indeed, 3D sits firmly in the middle of its technological ecosystem: Sony produces 3D television sets, 3D movies (*Avatar* was shot with Sony HD cameras), and now 3D games. As it did with Blu-ray, Sony is betting big on the technology, and the PS3 is where all of these three dimensional roads converge.

Gran Turismo 5


Crysis 2

MotorStorm: Apocalypse

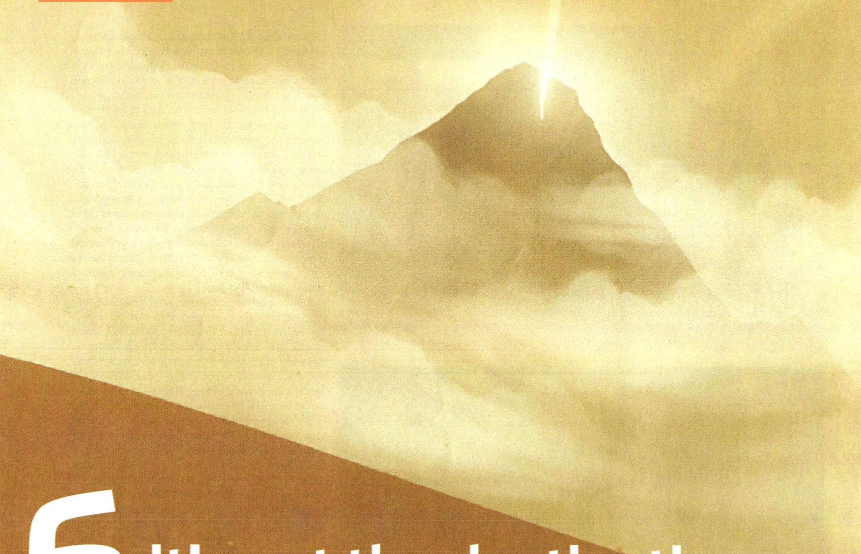
As of right now, the first batch of 3D games is available for download on PSN: *WipEout HD, Super Stardust HD, Pain,* and a demo of *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift.* More interesting, however, is what's just around the corner: Sony has announced that 30 3D games will see release by the end of 2010, many of which have been designed for 3D play from the ground up. This list includes first-party games *MotorStorm: Apocalypse, The Sly Collection* (an HD collection of the PS2 *Sly Cooper* games), *Gran Turismo 5, EyePet: Move Edition,* and *Killzone 3,* as well as *Crysis 2, Mortal Kombat, Ghost Recon,* and *Tron: Evolution* from third-party developers—all of which are slated to support 3D on their respective days of release. Of course, in order to play these games in 3D, a 3D-capable television set is required (available in LCD, LED, or plasma varieties, from most major manufacturers), in conjunction with active-shutter 3D glasses.

In our experience, 3D gaming is a rather easy thing to adjust to—we experienced no motion sickness or headaches during our short demo sessions. Jumping into the third dimension with *MotorStorm: Apocalypse* brought details to the (literal) foreground that we hadn't noticed before: bits of the environment like debris and car parts as they came hurtling toward the camera. The tension was enhanced dramatically as the racecourse fell apart around us, with buildings toppling above and streets crumbling below. *Killzone 3,* likewise, saw positive gains from being played in 3D: Judging distance from enemies was significantly easier and more intuitive, and watching an enemy fly backward into the environment after an impact really brought the physicality of the character to life. Finally, while washing our EyePet, steam appeared on virtual glass; water droplets slowly formed over time and began dripping with stunningly realistic effect.

Indeed, it's a new art and science for the development community to come to grips with. Several of the developers we spoke to emphasized the importance of immersing rather than assaulting the player with 3D; that is to say, bringing the player into the screen rather than bringing the game out of the screen to the player. It's a simple, philosophical approach to 3D game development that underscores the importance of understanding the new medium, and one that can be seen in the difference between, say, Michael Jackson's *Captain EO* and James Cameron's *Avatar.* As with most things, subtlety will trump severity.

Of course, there's plenty to be dealt with in the transition to 3D. Some of the hurdles are logistical: For one, it's not clear how lengthy gaming sessions will affect users, as games are often played in longer stretches than, say, watching a two-hour movie. Those who wear prescription eyeglasses, likewise, will need a better solution than simply wearing two pairs of glasses, and the relatively high price of 3D television sets is exacerbated by the price of the required glasses, which currently range from around $100 to $200 per pair (though at least one pair of glasses is usually included with the TV).

Ultimately, however, it's impossible to ignore the potential of 3D technology in the interactive space. Games are so often experiences meant to transport the player to virtual worlds, and the inclusion of a realistic three-dimensional field seems as significant an addition to their immersive arsenal as we've seen in many a console generation.



6 It's not the destination...

But rather the *Journey* that counts

We live in a high-tech, connected world. We can talk to anyone, anywhere on the planet, at any time. We speed to work at 65 miles per hour. We have access to the largest database of knowledge humans have ever collected. We have been to the moon and back again.

We are powerful. We are like gods.

This is what Jenova Chen was pondering as he began to work on his next game. The creative director for thatgamecompany *(flOw, Flower)* couldn't help but see the parallels in the videogame world—where it's also all about wielding and controlling power—and think: What's missing?

His answer: a sense of wonder. Or, the joy of feeling small, and the memory of being lost in a larger world.

Enter *Journey*, another minimal, ambient game coming to PSN in 2011. The premise is simple: We are lost in the desert. We see a pyramid-like structure in the distance. With no other motivation or instructions, we simply begin to wander toward it.

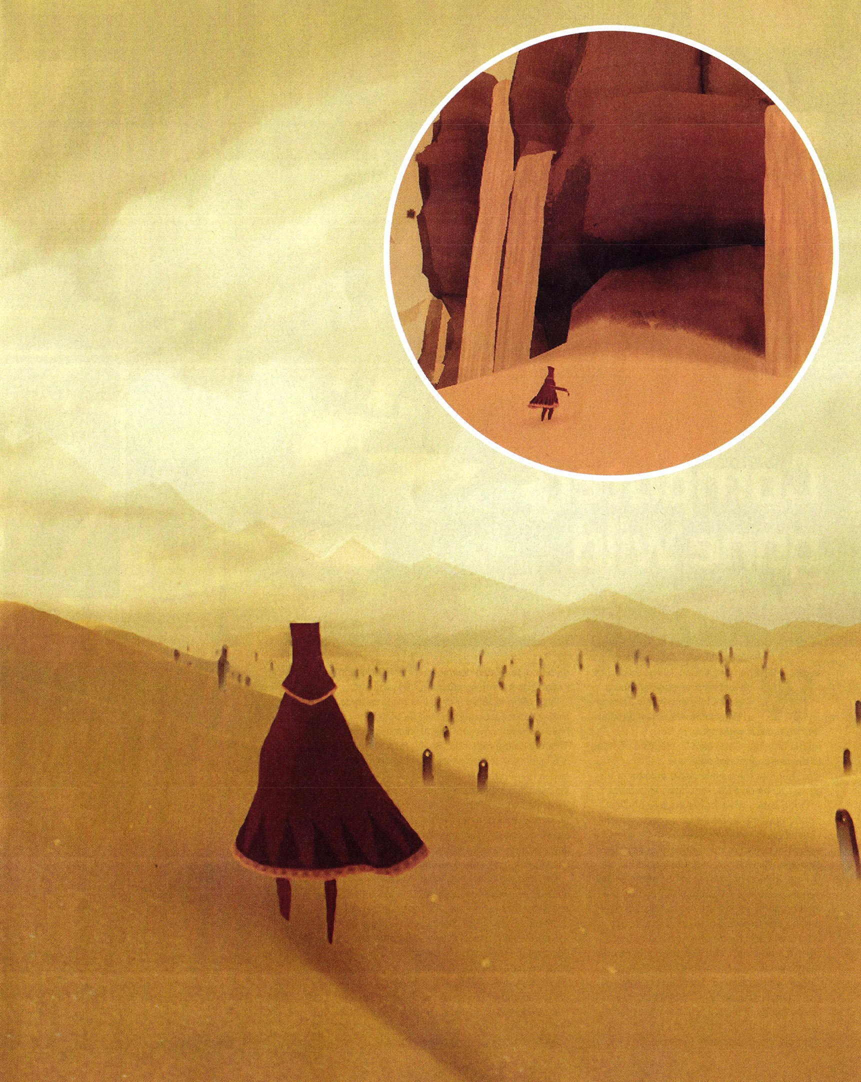
Just like *Flower* showcased some nifty tech in the motion of the game's grass and petals, *Journey* offers up an achingly beautiful take on sand. Our avatar will feel what it's like to shuffle through sand, Chen tells us, feet sinking in as we run, leaving trails in our wake that will slowly fill in behind us. We can surf on the sand, which at times will gently undulate like the ocean waves. We can play in sand waterfalls, and peek behind them to find hidden secrets.

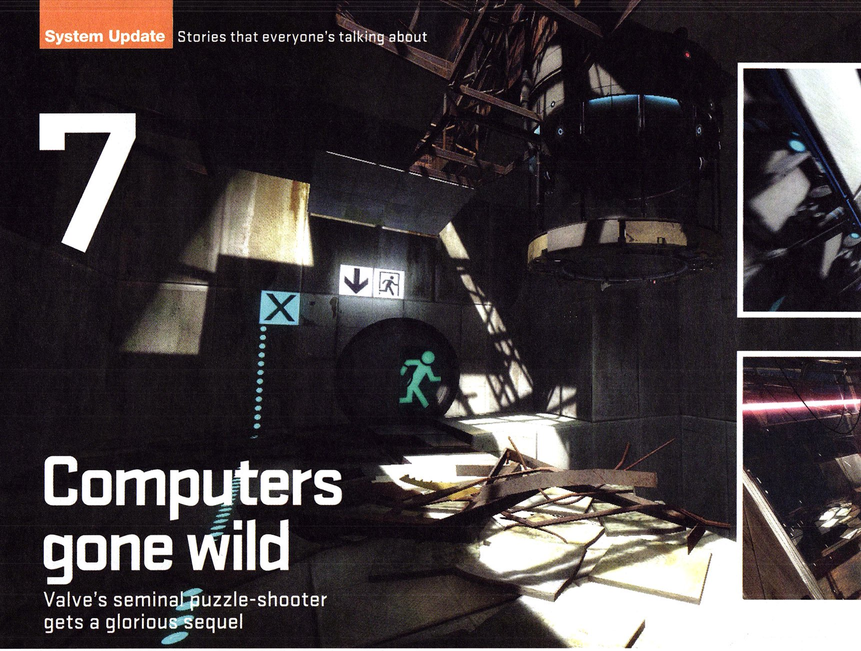
The other "element" in the game is cloth, which can be "harmonized" and collected as a resource to create paths and platforms. At one point during our demo, we encountered a small cluster of ruins. We touched a stone, which then revealed a new mysterious bit of architecture. Later, we found a giant piece of cloth which, when touched, turned from white to red with glowing glyphs. We used this cloth to ascend to a higher point, then summoned forth a flurry of smaller cloth bits that re-formed into a bridge, allowing us to climb even higher until we reached a circle of statues on a distant mesa. At that point, the world somehow transformed; the fog lifted and the dusty brown skies turned a wistful pale blue.

It's all very mysterious, but the biggest mystery will be the potential companions who join us on our journeys. At various random times, we'll encounter one other player in our world, and that person will remain anonymous. We won't know his name, age, sex or any other details. It's up to the pair of us to decide if we want to travel together or continue alone; if we want to journey for a long stretch or for a short jaunt. There's no voice-chat or text-chat—just the barebones suite of gestures that are naturally part of our character, like running, jumping, and singing.

Chen likens this new take on multiplayer to hiking: "You go by yourself, sometimes you see another hiker, you can travel together, or you can travel alone. If you don't like the guy, you can wander off. Or you can play by yourself all the way through."

Just like the journey of life, Chen says, we cross paths with various people, they eventually leave us, and perhaps we'll meet them again. The focus here is on finding our way in a vast, mysterious world and connecting with strangers at the most basic level: as two humans adrift in a wondrous location, where the simple shared act of exploration is a joy unto itself.





7

Computers gone wild

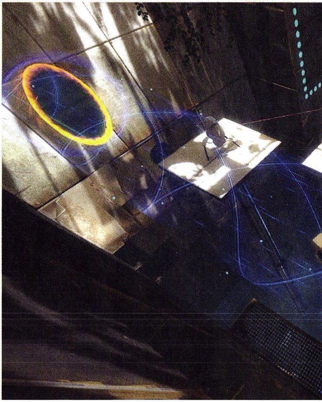
Valve's seminal puzzle-shooter gets a glorious sequel

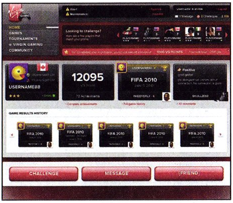
When developer Valve decided to cancel its press conference a week before this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, it did so for a reason. A week later, at Sony's huge E3 media briefing, Gabe Newell stepped onstage to announce that not only is *Portal 2* on its way, but that the best console version of the game will be on PS3. High fives all around.

Once again, we assume the role of Chell, returning to the Aperture lab to find it seemingly abandoned, overgrown with foliage since the defeat of the most evil of computer systems, GlaDOS. But as fate would have it, we are, in fact, not alone: In our demo of the sequel, we see GlaDOS busily repairing the environment, as broken wall panels flip over one by one to reveal new ones, and robot arms build and repair other systems. "It's been a long time," GlaDOS says in her trademark menacing, auto-tuned inflection. "I think we can put our differences behind us. For science. You monster." We're quickly introduced to one of the game's new characters: Wheatley, a robotic "personality sphere" with a British accent who asks to be plugged into a data port so he can download some information ("I can't do it if you're watching," he protests).

According to Valve, *Portal 2* is twice as large as its predecessor, and to help us out we'll have a slew of new tools at our disposal. The Thermal Discouragement Beam, for instance, is a laser that can be angled through mirrored cubes to burn droids that would be otherwise inaccessible, while the Pneumatic Diversity Vent is a vacuum tube that sucks up robots. Likewise, repulsion gel can be sprayed all over a surface to allow for long-distance bouncing, while propulsion gel makes surfaces slippery, allowing for high-speed sliding.

Oh, and the best part: Valve has also added two-player co-op, available for either splitscreen or online play. We got our hands on these levels, which are built solely for co-op, and were amazed at how much the portal-hopping mechanic can lend itself to two-player puzzle solving, requiring us at times to direct our partner while we were stationed in one area, and at other times to carefully plan a sequence of rapid-fire portal maneuvers that had us teleporting both ourselves and various objects to find our way to the exit.





8 Game On, Virgin...

Virgingaming.com offers cash, competition

Online play is a minefield not easily navigated, but virgingaming.com plans to change that.

The site serves as an online gathering point for game fans. Signup is free, and it allows players to compete online in select games via PlayStation Network.

Recently launched, the site provides for both free- and prize-based competitions, and its creators seem to have taken some very tangible steps to weed out the bad elements. Jerks and teabaggers, beware: Virgingaming.com tracks bad behavior, encouraging us to compete fairly and treat our fellow gamers with respect. After every online match, we're encouraged to give feedback. Those with a penchant for poor sportsmanship will find it increasingly difficult to find matches; conversely, those of us with good reputations will be eligible to compete in special invite-only events. The site utilizes a special "game validator" system that takes the results of matches directly from the game servers themselves, so there's no room for disputes.

Virgin further encourages competition with a skill-based rank system ensuring we can tackle foes with similar abilities. The site and its various social networking features are free to use, but we'll have to pony up real cash (via PayPal.com) to join tournaments.

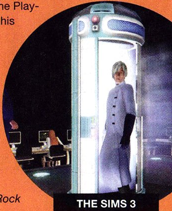
Now Playing

Virgingaming.com currently supports the following titles: *Fight Night Round 4, Madden NFL 10, FIFA 10, NHL 10, NCAA Football 10, ModNation Racers*, and *UFC Undisputed 2010.* More will become available, of course, and Virgin recently signed an agreement with Ubisoft, ensuring not only will the publisher's games be accessible, but also that exclusive content such as maps will be made available.

GRAN TURISMO 5

9 Readers' Most Wanted

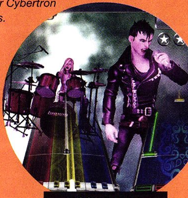
Everyone loves a sequel, and game companies have loaded their plates with updates to beloved franchises. In fact, only one game on this list (*Red Dead Redemption: Outlaws to the End,* a downloadable expansion for a new game) squeaks by as neither sequel nor update. It's a fine list, chock full of shooting, sports, and little computer people, and certainly bodes well for the PlayStation in the second half of this year and beyond.



THE SIMS 3

1. *Gran Turismo 5*
2. *Call of Duty: Black Ops*
3. *Madden NFL 11*
4. *LittleBigPlanet 2*
5. *The Sims 3*
6. *Rock Band 3*
7. *Fallout: New Vegas*
8. *Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock*
9. *Medal of Honor*
10. *SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs*
11. *Twisted Metal*
12. *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II*
13. *NBA Elite 11*
14. *NCAA Football 11*
15. *Transformers: War for Cybertron*
16. *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011*
17. *Dead Rising*
18. *Max Payne 3*
19. *Red Dead Redemption: Outlaws to the End*
20. *F.E.A.R. 3*

This ranking comes courtesy of OTX Research. All games are PS3 titles scheduled to release after July 1, 2010. The polling period for this data was May 23, 2010, to June 5, 2010.



ROCK BAND 3

"Board" of life? Try zombieism!

10 Zombies: Enough is enough already?

PTOM editors Scott and Greg square off on a life and death issue

YES

Says champion of the living

Scott Butterworth

I have no problem with the undead, per se. I'm actually all for the idea of zombies. But I do have an issue with zombies popping up in nearly every single game, regardless of genre: *Skate, Call of Duty,* countless PlayStation Network titles, and on and on. It's complete overkill. If *Skate 3* had included its secret zombie code a few years ago, I probably would have loved it. But at this point, I just immediately groan anytime I see the word "zombie" in a game because it's become such a grating cliché.

Imagine going to a party where every single person immediately tells the exact same joke. Even if the joke is funny the first time, it will undoubtedly age quickly, perhaps prompting a violent response wherein folks knock over the punchbowl and storm out. And really, who would cast blame when that happens? There has to come a point when someone takes a stand and declares, "Enough is enough, guys. It's just not funny anymore." And indeed, we have reached the point of complete zombie saturation.

For games like *Dead Rising 2* that fully commit to the zombie sub-genre, incorporating the undead makes sense. But for everyone else: be fresh, be creative, and surprise us with something unique rather than resuscitating this long-expired meme.

NO

Says the dear but not departed

Greg Orlando

We at *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* have resolved, unanimously, to superglue the punchbowl at all our forthcoming social functions.

The game industry has two perfect foils with which to work: Nazis and zombies. With the jackbooted Nazi, we can see the perfect expression of humanity gone wrong. Zombies offer the complete absence of humanity in humanoid form. They look like us, but don't think or laugh or cry. They're at once the ultimate novelty and the ultimate horror.

Game developers have made heroes of zombies and done wonders developing them as nemeses. We've seen it time and again with everything from *MediEvil* to *Resident Evil.* Why shouldn't we embrace zombies as bit players, too?

We've seen a wealth of quality titles featuring zombies as antagonists and my esteemed opposition will concede what we're arguing is the overuse of the undead in peripheral roles. And if the issue at hand is how zombies are being used in downloadable content and throwaway game modes, we're honestly and truly making a mountain out of a molehill. If there's any overuse of zombies, it's just the game industry's overzealousness at play. We've seen it before with "extreme" games and with the ubiquitous big-head modes. These might seem like tiresome trends, but only to those who are, perhaps, dead inside.

"...INTENSE SHOOTOUTS"... – GAMESPOT "...STUNNING"... – G4TV

"...AT THE TOP OF OUR MOST WANTED LIST" – IGN "...REMARKABLE"... – CBS NEWS

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Want that

Lust-haves for PlayStation people

Sony Bravia XBR-60LX900

Looking to experience the PS3's 3D capabilities? Enter Sony's 3D-capable XBR-60LX900: this 60-inch, 1080p beast includes two pairs of 3D glasses, LED backlighting, a sensor that dims the backlight if no one's in the room, and Internet connectivity.

$5,000

www.sonystyle.com

Zoom H2 Recorder

Utilizing an X/Y microphone configuration and delivering 24-bit/96kHz stereo recordings, the H2 can hold 50 hours of uncompressed recordings on a 32GB micro SDHC card and a single AA battery nets about 10 hours of run time.

$99

www.samsontech.com

Handy Recorder H1
zoom

Sony NEX-5

Need a camera that can shoot amazing photos, but don't want to deal with the bulk and weight of a digital SLR? Sony's NEX-5 fits the bill perfectly: Interchangable lenses, great image quality in low light, and a body weight of 8.1 ounces are just a few of the ways it says, "I love you."

$699

www.sonystyle.com

SONY
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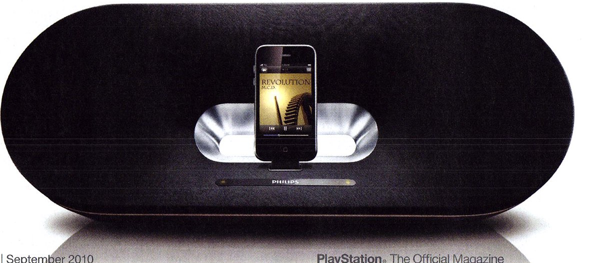

Philips Fidelio Docking Speaker

Compatible with any iPhone or iPod, the DS9000 is a high end music docking station. The design is complemented by precisely tuned bass pipes, interference shielding technology, and a dedicated app that enhances functionality.

$500

www.philips.com

Prices and availability of products are correct as of press time.

gamesradar.

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FIRST HEADSHOT:

5pm Friday, August 20

Feel like giving up food, sleep, and personal hygiene for the chance to shoot GamesRadar's finest in the face? Bring it on. For full details on what we'll be playing and how to find us, head to

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Blu-ray Central

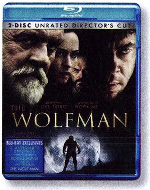
Blu-ray Disc
CLINT EASTWOOD IN
THE MAN WITH NO NAME TRILOGY
A SERGIO LEONE COLLECTION

The Man with No Name Trilogy

PRICE: $69.99 **RATED:** R

✚ It's easy to throw around a word like "iconic" when talking about movies, but it's entirely appropriate in the case of *The Man with No Name Trilogy.* Iconic in every sense of the word, these classic films took the framework of Akira Kurosawa's gritty samurai classics (especially *Yojimbo)* and moved them to a setting much more familiar to western audiences. Director Sergio Leone may have been working on a shoestring budget and his work is a little rough around the edges, yet his collaborations with the young Clint Eastwood have endured as an inspiration for countless filmmakers. Leone singlehandedly recreated the idea of what a Western could be in 1964 with *A Fistful of Dollars*, and made Eastwood an action star unlike any seen before. Even Ennio Morricone's masterful scores have become immortalized in popular culture.

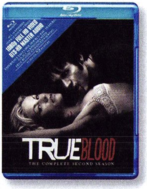
The Blu-ray collection contains *A Fistful of Dollars, For a Few Dollars More*, and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.* The bleached, depressed landscapes are a little noisy, but the video and audio quality is excellent overall. The extras include a lot of interesting old documentaries and promo material, and the commentary could even be characterized as film-expert scholarly. Overall, these three movies are still as enthrallingly entertaining as they were 30 years ago, and this box is highly recommended.



The Wolfman

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** R

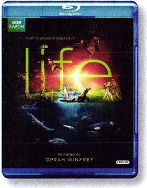
✚ Had the script been tighter and the characters fleshed out better, Universal's attempt to revive *The Wolfman* might well have been as much a classic as the original. As it is though, the movie is still a hell of a monster movie. Not shying away from gratuitous, R-rated violence, this werewolf is no touchy-feely, misunderstood creature. Instead, director Joe Johnston gives horror fans a heaping buffet of gore, dismemberments, and decapitations. Anthony Hopkins is gleefully in his element, and there's a decent amount of extras—although we'd prefer they included a DVD or Blu-ray copy of the original 1941 film instead of a mediocre streaming version.



True Blood: Season 2

PRICE: $79.98 **RATED:** NR

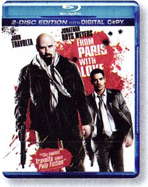
✚ The best chick show for men…ever. Crazy orgies, nudity, blood, gore, violence—no stone goes unturned in the second season of HBO's ever-improving supernatural series. The production values and acting are universally exceptional, with solid writing to back them. The expert mix of drama, romance, and suspense make the series appealing to both the horror and romance crowd. There are also several commentary tracks, a picture-in-picture viewing mode, and a fifth disc dedicated to extras.


BBC EARTH
Life
narrated by OPRAH WINFREY

Life

PRICE: $69.99 **RATED:** NR

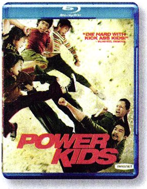
+ Available in two flavors—the original David Attenborough-narrated BBC version, or the Oprah-narrated Discovery Channel version—*Life* carries on the fine tradition of bringing home the most amazing high-definition footage of our planet you'll ever see. Although you're getting the same stunning footage either way, the Attenborough version is still easily the way to go. Aside from his comfortingly familiar English professor lilt, Attenborough's narration is simply deeper. The extras mostly consist of how the series was made, though there is a collection of rather graphic deleted scenes as well.


2-DISC EDITION WITH DIGITAL COPY
JOHN TRAVOLTA
JONATHAN RHYS MEYERS
FROM PARIS WITH LOVE

From Paris with Love

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

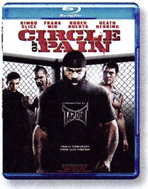
+ Fans of Luc Besson's inspired and outrageous action productions should be used to putting their thought processes on hold for thrill rides such as *The Transporter, District B13*, and the surprisingly intense *Taken. From Paris with Love* is firmly in line with the action-first, plot-second nature of such films. While the plot is paper-thin, watching John Travolta play a ludicrously badass wet-works agent with straight-laced John Rhys-Meyers (who seems to be channeling Keanu Reeves) in tow is easily recommendable as a guilty pleasure.


"DIE HARD WITH KICK ASS KIDS!"
POWER KIDS

Power Kids

PRICE: $29.98 **RATED:** R

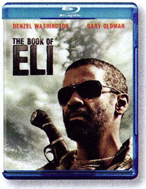
– There's something to be said for both the country (Thailand) and people who make an R-rated action movie about kick-boxing kids taking on violent terrorists in a hospital—especially when the happy ending is that the poor little sick boy who needed a heart transplant is well enough to be caned by his instructor. *Power Kids* is really only recommendable for diehard Asian film lovers, with its threadbare plot and incredibly slow pacing. Yet, when the action does finally start, there are some amazing fights.


KIMBO SLICE
FRANK MIR
ROGER HUERTA
HEATH HERRING
CIRCLE OF PAIN
TAPOUT

Circle of Pain

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** R

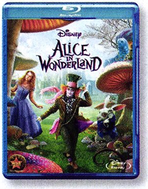
– Oh, Tapout, you started so well with *Unrivaled. Circle of Pain* is aptly named, because it's actually painful to watch. A terrible and clichéd plot, horrid dialogue, and appalling acting drag down the few decent scenes of violence and nudity. This is just another straight-to-video train wreck that isn't worth a rental or a bargain bin purchase. Still, if you ever wanted to see Bai Ling naked (or are confused about when her career jumped the tracks), this is your chance.


DENZEL WASHINGTON
GARY OLDMAN
THE BOOK OF ELI

The Book of Eli

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

– Based on the level of stylized action, atmosphere, and acting, *The Book of Eli* is definitely an engaging post-apocalyptic trip. Denzel Washington is absolutely badass as a man on a mission, and Gary Oldman goes old-school crazy as the power-hungry bad guy. Unfortunately, the plot ties itself around a completely improbable Christian-centric hitching post, the big reveal at the end is laughable, and there's no shortage of post-apocalypse movie clichés to make fun of—seriously, in a world where basic staples are so scarce, how does everyone manage to find goggles and trench coats? Still, the great action might make it worth a rental.


Disney
ALICE IN WONDERLAND

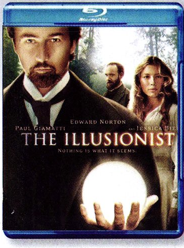
Alice in Wonderland

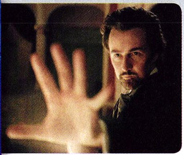
PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG

+ Tim Burton's take on the classic *Alice in Wonderland* stories is a bold move for Disney. The Disney name and ideology isn't a perfect mesh with Burton's amazingly dark and bizarre visions, yet the end result is still an amazing, sensory-enthralling jaunt through the surreal. Although the film is more computer-generated than live action, the cast is exceptional, the dialogue quick and witty, and the visuals and audio are absolutely gorgeous. The extras are sadly light, but the Blu-ray version is available with or without the DVD and digital copy.

More Blasts from the Past

Take the Wayback Machine to yesteryear with these adventures

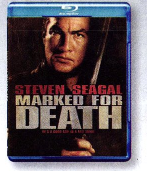

EDWARD NORTON
PAUL GIAMATTI
JESSICA BIEL
THE ILLUSIONIST
NOTHING IS WHAT IT SEEMS



The Illusionist

PRICE: $24.99 **RATED:** PG-13

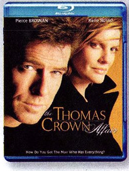
Although not nearly as disturbingly brilliant as that other magician movie *(The Prestige), The Illusionist* is still a beautifully filmed, well-acted affair deserving of the high-definition treatment.


STEVEN SEAGAL
MARKED FOR DEATH

Marked for Death

PRICE: $24.95 **RATED:** R

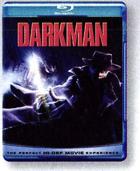
This voodoo-laced action film is vastly better than any of the dreck the ever-more-pompous (and out-of-shape) Steven Seagal has done lately.


Pierce BROSNAN
Rene RUSSO
The THOMAS CROWN Affair
How Do You Get The Man Who Has Everything?

The Thomas Crown Affair

PRICE: $24.99 **RATED:** R

Pierce Brosnan exudes charm and style and Rene Russo radiates hotness in this clever and sexy heist movie.


DARKMAN
THE PERFECT HI-DEF MOVIE EXPERIENCE

Darkman

PRICE: $26.98 **RATED:** R

Sadly, it's not the best transfer to Blu-ray we've seen, but Sam Raimi's first superhero movie remains a violent and fun comic book classic.

Questions, comments, rants, raves about our Blu-ray reviews? Email Jason D'Aprile at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

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MORTAL KOMBAT

K is for "Kombat," by which we mean "Kill"

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** TBD 2011 **GENRE:** Fighting **PUBLISHER:** Warner Bros. Interactive Ent. **DEVELOPER:** NetherRealm Studios

Theoretically, it shouldn't be possible to make the *Mortal Kombat* fighting series more violent. After all, the series routinely features larger-than-life fighters divesting their opponents of their spines.

This new *Kombat*, rest assured, is more violent than its predecessors. Intriguingly, it may also herald the seemingly moribund series' return to relevance, if not greatness.

The Three Stooges' famous eye poke is taken to new extremes here. The green-clad and inhuman Reptile takes his index and middle fingers and jams them into the robotic warrior Sektor's eye sockets. The game lingers over the scene, the gory spectacle highlighted by an X-ray effect showing every bit of the gruesome pageantry. Other, exaggerated attacks are also highlighted in this manner: rib- and jawbones shatter, organs explode, and axes cut into shoulder blades. The developers note that each character's skeleton is unique, given that, well, some of the characters are not human and others are wholly mechanical. Each of these special X-ray attacks is stunning in its viciousness, and it's a fine reminder that Warner Bros. has chosen to highlight the series' mature-audiences-only presentation.

Sharper and more explicit, *Kombat* also seeks to refine its fighting. The game now provides for three-dimensional backgrounds, but only two-dimensional fighting. This, according to Warner Bros. representatives, focuses the action and should allow players to concentrate more on

↗ Back Into Kombat

This will be Warner Bros.' first crack at the *Mortal Kombat* series. Formerly, *Mortal Kombat* was developed and published by Midway Games, but Midway died an agonizing death and its assets were greedily snatched up. Fans of the series will be glad to note this new *Kombat* is in good hands, specifically, those of the series' co-creator Ed Boon and the developers at the newly rechristened NetherRealm Studios.

> “It’s expected the roster will be rounded up with *Mortal Kombat’s* usual assortment of gods, creeps, and weirdoes.”

fighting and less on their characters’ alignment in a 3D space.

To further promote depth, the developers have also done away with canned fighting game combinations. Now, instead of memorizing long chains of joystick movements and button presses, we can string together punches, kicks, and throws in any way we see fit. Gone, too, is the ability to alter a Kombateer’s fighting style on the fly. It seems one style per fighter is more than enough; we can alter the alignment of a fighter’s body during a fight, but only to better line up combinations.

Killer Kast

The game’s iconic characters, of course, remain intact. A brief playtest was like coming home again—if home dripped blood, and mom had lost her head after a particularly gruesome fatality. The game allowed access to Johnny Cage, the hat-tossing Kung Lao, Scorpion, Sub-Zero, Reptile, Sektor, Mileena, and Nightwolf, with others such as the villainous Shao Kahn ensconced in the backgrounds. It’s expected the roster will be rounded up with *Kombat’s* usual assortment of gods, creeps, and weirdoes, including Raiden, Sonya, Jax, Smoke, Kitana, Liu Kang, and more.

The triumvirate of pillars for this new *Mortal Kombat* is completed with an emphasis on the game’s blood-spattering finales, the fatalities. Here, the developers seem to be plumbing their most twisted depths in order to come up with horrifying finishers for their characters: Reptile pries a foe’s mouth open to vomit acid into it; Kung Lao tosses his spinning razor-sharp hat on the ground and an enemy’s prone body is dragged across it, cutting it in two like a buzzsaw gag in a kiddy cartoon; Mileena tosses her kitanas into a an opponent’s chest, then proceeds to rip his head off, and messily consumes part of it; and Sektor uses missiles to blow the other guy into chunks and then more missiles to target the airborne bits. It’s as if the creators were being paid not by hour, but rather the horror.

The game is still some ways away from completion, to be sure, but all the elements seemed in place. *Kombat* is primed for its reincarnation, and the developers are energized all over again. This may indeed prove to be a brand-new start for the beloved, blood-caked franchise. | Greg Orlando

HOMEFRONT

One nation, under the gun

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q1 2011 GENRE: First-Person Shooter PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Kaos Studios

Forget the heart. "Home is where the WAR is."

That's the grim slogan for THQ's *Homefront,* a unique first-person shooter that imagines a politically radical world of the future in which North Korea has invaded and currently occupies the United States.

Invasion USA

While most "Average Joes" might scoff at the notion of a global superpower such as America being successfully occupied by a small nation currently in the throes of famine and economic decline, THQ has invested heavily in ensuring the accuracy of the game's political backstory. The intricate history and speculative fiction of *Homefront* was conceived by screenwriter/director John Milius *(Apocalypse Now, Conan the Barbarian),* perhaps best known for his work on *Red Dawn,* another tale about the invasion of America. THQ also consulted with a team of experts in Asian affairs with impressive credentials linked to the CIA.

In the *Homefront* universe, North Korean dictator Kim Jong-Il—perhaps best-known by gamers from his spoofed movie appearance in 2004's *Team America: World Police*—has died, paving the way for his bloodthirsty son, Kim Jong-Un. Under this younger, more dynamic leader, North- and South Korea unite in 2015, gaining strength while nurturing a hatred for all things American.

Meanwhile, in America, a significant economic downturn and recession in 2017 bring about the demise of the U.S. dollar and pave the way for major military cutbacks. With America's diminished presence in the Pacific, Japan surrenders to the Korean army and sparks the spread of a Korean empire. By 2022, North Korea has absorbed most of the southeast Asian nations and, given the decimated American economy, is in a good position to further exert its power.

Following an electromagnetic pulse set off via satellite and a subsequent cyberattack, the U.S. military is virtually blind, with most of its now-outdated equipment rendered useless. This paves the way for a Korean invasion and takeover of the city of San Francisco in 2025, which becomes its operational base of power in the western U.S.

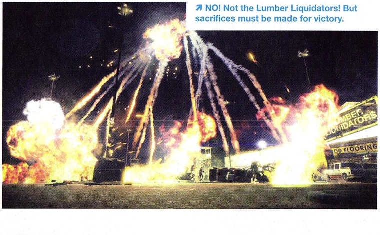
Rocky Mountain High

Homefront's gameplay kicks off in 2027 in Montrose, Colo., where the game's protagonist is being harbored by a band of renegade Americans living in a decimated neighborhood. The preview we were shown began at the start of chapter two, as the player is led around this crude free village by a grizzled man wearing a state police jacket. A map of the United States that's tacked on a wall shows that the center of the country, around the Mississippi River, has been declared a "Radiation Zone."

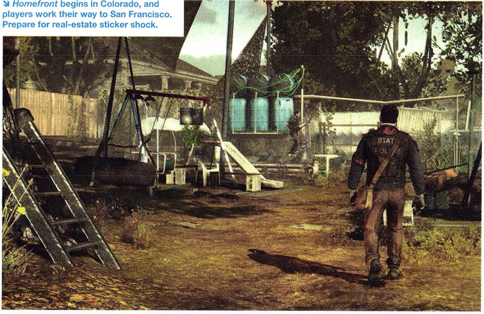
The feeling of walking around the dingy camp, speaking with American refugees (and, in one case, being chided humorously for spending too much time around the town goat), is less reminiscent of an action-oriented first-person shooter and more akin to the experience of *Fallout 3.* As THQ explains, *Homefront* isn't just about combat with America serving as the backdrop; instead, the game is peppered with what they referred to as "Why We Fight" moments that enrich the backstory and give the game an emotional core. But that's not to say *Homefront* doesn't have some fire in its belly.

Fire in the Hole

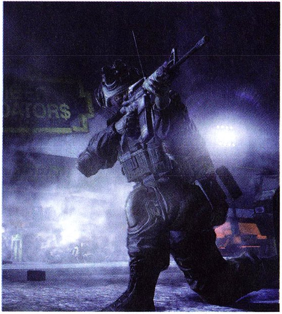
Chapter three starts with a bang, as a female assassin in our company chokes out a Korean soldier silently—and violently. It's a prelude to an infiltration mission—the Koreans are using a Lumber Liquidators store



↗ NO! Not the Lumber Liquidators! But sacrifices must be made for victory.



↘ *Homefront* begins in Colorado, and players work their way to San Francisco. Prepare for real-estate sticker shock.



(think Home Depot), and our team intends to break in. Seeing Korean soldiers camped out in a distinctly American parking lot—with a Hooters sign in view—is jarring...but not for long. An SUV tears into the parking lot, creating a diversion and sending Korean soldiers scurrying in its wake. An airstrike quickly ignites the Koreans, and, armed with a sniper rifle, our character is instructed to "put them out of their misery." When a blast takes out the rooftop from beneath our feet, we're plunged into an immersive battle.

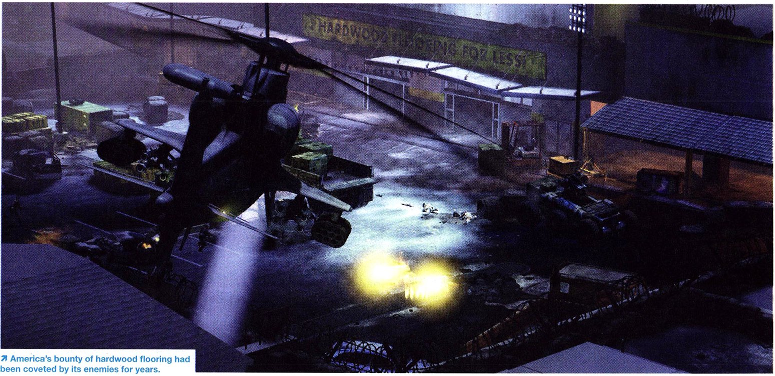
With flaming debris littered about and ignited enemies staggering all around, it's necessary to take cover, and here the game does a good job of conveying the chaos of such an intense situation with shaky camera effects. Several weapons were available, including an M4 rifle and grenades, and depleting health was indicated with a rapidly reddening screen. The mission unfolds as the hero takes control of a Goliath tank, which is disabled by a Korean EMP that players and their artificial intelligence-controlled team must stop. In the meantime, a helicopter is raining fire from above. It was an impressive display of combat, and from what THQ promised, just a small sample of what the single-player campaign will include.

> **"Battling an army of human oppressors is more engaging than fighting off a horde of alien invaders."**

How the West Was Won

THQ explained that the single-player campaign will tie into North Korea's occupation of the western U.S., which is sustained by air drops of troops and equipment to key cities from the primary San Francisco base. As a U.S. freedom fighter, we'll work our way from Colorado to San Francisco, fighting the Korean occupation along the way. While not much was disclosed regarding multiplayer modes, it was stated that multiplayer gaming would focus more on larger battles between the two armies.

What we saw of *Homefront* was impressive: immersive combat with a rich, well-conceived storyline. It's also unique in that the action isn't predicated by a post-apocalyptic nuclear event or other world-threatening cataclysm; rather, the enemy is political in nature, and battling against an army of human oppressors is, in theory, more engaging than fighting off a horde of alien invaders. We're eagerly anticipating more intel on *Homefront* and making plans to join the resistance. | Dan DiGiacomo



↗ America's bounty of hardwood flooring had been coveted by its enemies for years.

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

Criterion Game's pursuit of greatness

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** November **GENRE:** Driving **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** Criterion Games

Among the goals Criterion had when it took over the development of *Need for Speed:* to make us smile the moment we pick up the controller.

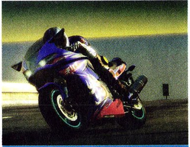
Simple, yes. It's an aspiration all developers should pursue. And yet after being buried beneath the impenetrable layers of complexity found in many contemporary games, we can't help but wonder if Criterion should be holding workshops for development teams around the globe. Because *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit* didn't just get us to grin immediately; it made us feel as if we can actually take on the fuzz in some of the most intense car chases we've ever played.

This is *Need for Speed* by way of *Burnout,* Criterion's previous masterpiece of car-based gaming. Within 10 seconds we were powersliding like champs, and within minutes we were evading our pursuer using slick driving maneuvers and clever powerups, such as a radar-jamming device that helped us fake out our police escort as we sped off down a side road. Later, when playing as a cop, we careened down the gorgeous tree-lined streets of Big Timber Pass at an impossible velocity, sideswiping signs and dodging oncoming traffic, calling in air support to deploy a road block, eventually ending the pursuit with a satisfying slow-mo crash once the racer took enough damage from all our jostling, nudging, and other assorted damage-dealing moves.

Share the Road

But it's not enough to bring *Burnout*-style gameplay to *Speed.* Criterion also wants to "reimagine and redefine *Need for Speed* for a connected generation," creative director Craig Sullivan says. That's where Autolog comes in. Using a simple interface that should be comfortable to anyone who's ever visited a social-networking site, Autolog aims to connect gamers to whatever is most important. If, for example, a friend tries something we've yet to sample, or if another friend beats our personal best performance in any given mode, that information will be pushed toward us, and with one button press we can immediately go to that event and take up that challenge. Meanwhile, whatever we do goes back to the server and pushes out to our friends, perpetuating this ever-growing list of challenges and options.

"Lots of games have old-school leaderboards or are pretending to recommend things," senior producer Matt Webster says. "This focuses



↗ Need for Freebies

Criterion's *Burnout Paradise* was beloved not just for its gameplay, but also for its seemingly endless supply of free downloadable content, including everything from new modes to new cars and motorcycles (above). Will *Hot Pursuit* offer the same? Though Criterion wouldn't confirm anything at this point, creative director Craig Sullivan did say: "I'd be very surprised if a company that did a year of free downloads didn't do so for *Need for Speed*."

> " Within 10 seconds we were powersliding like champs, and within minutes we were evading our pursuer using slick driving maneuvers and clever powerups. "

on real recommendations. Autolog should be a great distraction the second you pop in the disc." And it's not just limited to friends. Information about the wider world is also available, including the most-driven roads, the most popular cars, and even who the most wanted racers are throughout the game. Better yet, this all happens automatically with no need to register for a special account. Criterion readily admits that each of these aspects might not be completely new, but they hope to bring everything together in one place, creating a "game loop" that'll change how everyone interacts with *Need for Speed*.

What a Trip

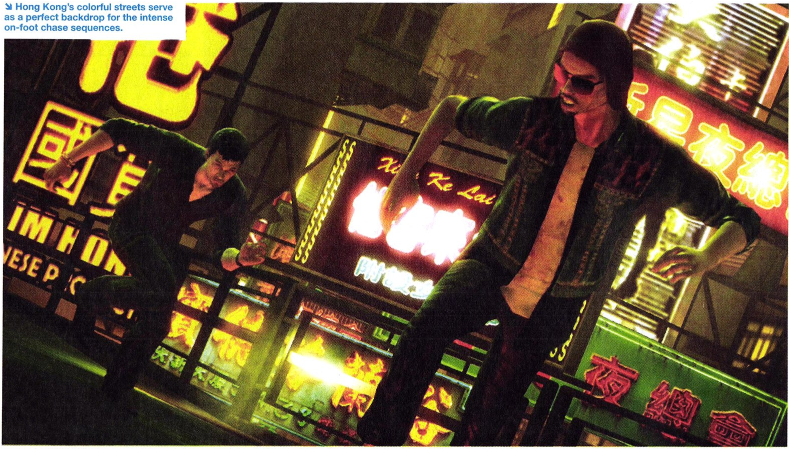
For the first time, Criterion is working with real cars, including supercars such as the Lamborghini Reventón and Pagani Zonda Cinque—but don't expect to customize or tinker with these high-performance rides. Instead, the goal is to keep things simple, to drive real cars the way we always dreamed we could. Or, as Sullivan reminds us: "It's called *Hot Pursuit*. We have really f–ing good pursuits in it, and it's going to be hot."

The game is also fully playable on- or offline, with two full career progressions (cop or racer) that can be switched between as we please. Scoring is also kept simple: anything we do in any mode will earn us bounty *(Pursuit's* version of experience points) and that bounty will fill a ranking bar, eventually unlocking new cars, new modes, and more.

All this takes place in an open-world environment with more than 100 miles of roadways. Though we only sampled the country roads in Big Timber Pass, we're promised a wide variety of highways and byways, lending the game the feeling of an epic high-speed journey—assuming we can evade our pursuers or chase our quarry long enough to see this massive world. | Gary Steinman

↘ This is no ordinary car. This is, like, Megacar.

POLICE
STOP



Hong Kong's colorful streets serve as a perfect backdrop for the intense on-foot chase sequences.

TRUE CRIME: HONG KONG

Big trouble in little China

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Adventure **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** United Front Games

We can feel our heart pound, the adrenaline surge, and we're not even really running. The low-level street scum we're chasing isn't sure if we're a cop or some criminal peon he's double-crossed, but he isn't waiting around to find out. Bystanders are being knocked over and street concessions destroyed as we scurry through Hong Kong's labyrinthine alleyways. A quick vault over a table and a shortcut up and over a low level wall makes up lost ground…just in time to meet our fleeing buddy's gang. Just great.

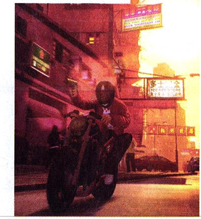
Fortunately, it's a situation our game hero, Wei Shen, is well prepared to handle. A highly trained undercover cop of Hong Kong's Triad Bureau, he makes short work of the hooligans with a deft array of martial arts moves, counters, and basically any handy object that can bash in a thug's skull. And if there happens to be something like, say, an exposed air conditioning fan to grind the baddies face into before a particularly brutal and graphic finishing move... well, all the better.

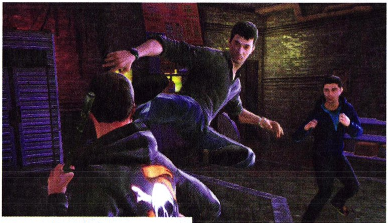
When Shen's not running down the criminal element on foot, he's apt to be driving and engaged in high-speed, raging gun battles. While there's plenty of traffic dodging and vehicular mayhem to be had, the focus is on the weapons combat employing a targeting mechanic similar to *Red Dead Redemption's* Dead Eye system: slowing down the action momentarily to allow for selective delivery of firepower.

But its how Shen presents and conducts himself between *True Crime's* action sequences that most impacts gameplay. His "face" (a combination of social standing, reputation, and outward appearance) is the key to navigating Hong Kong society and infiltrating the Triad criminal organization. How Shen dresses, what car he drives, and the way he interacts with people ultimately determines how effectively and successfully he progresses through the game's linear storyline.

Our early look at *True Crime: Hong Kong* revealed many of the thematic and gameplay elements that made Sega's *Yakuza* series a cult favorite, but sans the last-gen legacy control mechanics. If the story is half as good as *Yakuza's,* we'll be looking to go deep undercover with *True Crime* come fall. | Roger Burchill

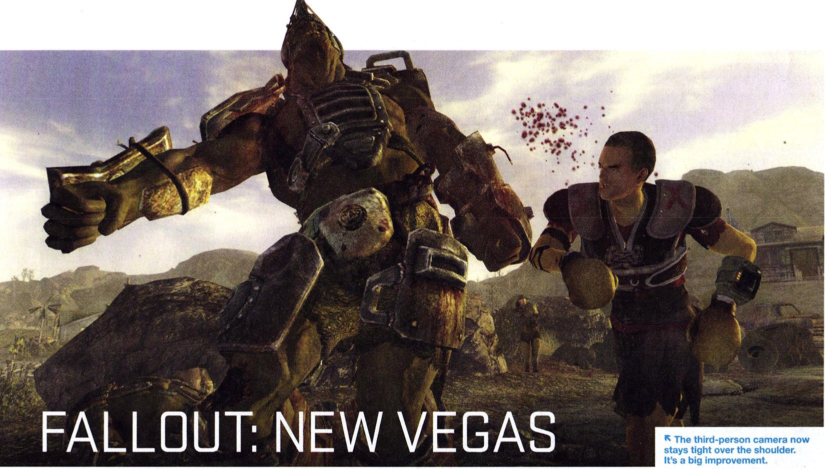
"Can I see your driver's license and gun registration, please?"





The combat system flows seamlessly among hand-to-hand, weapons-based melee, and environmental attacks.

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS



↖ The third-person camera now stays tight over the shoulder. It's a big improvement.

Like D.C., only deadlier

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:** Action RPG **PUBLISHER:** Bethesda Softworks **DEVELOPER:** Bethesda Softworks

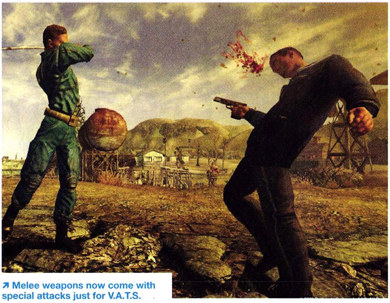
Two centuries and one global nuclear holocaust later, the bright lights of Vegas still burn defiantly under the starry desert sky. It's not exactly Las Vegas anymore—decades of looting and desperation have left the city in a visible state of decay—but the New Vegas strip buzzes with activity nonetheless: glitzy casinos, sexy consorts, and ominous security bots line the neon-soaked streets as drunken revelers stumble through the city, the lone oasis of light in a dark, barren landscape.

This is where we come in, face-to-face with a robot sheriff. Fortunately we're not in trouble (yet), so we back away slowly and head toward the nearest casino: The Tops. But before we reach the doors, a man approaches and offers to sell us concealable weapons since the local gambling joints confiscate larger guns. Apparently they don't take kindly to shootouts. Because of our well-developed sneak skill, however, we're given a unique dialogue option that lets us bargain our way out of a purchase and head to the casino unfettered.

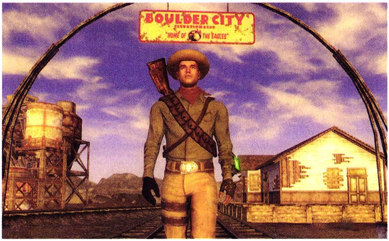
Of course, this doesn't stop the doorman from catching on to our scheme. When we refuse to relinquish our firearms and select the aggressive dialogue branch instead, hotel security decides to greet us with a hail of bullets. Despite *Fallout: New Vegas'* noticeably tighter aiming controls, more impactful gunfire, and vast assortment of new, customizable weapons—including a throwing spear and a machine gun that shoots mini-grenade rounds—it doesn't take long for us to get dead.

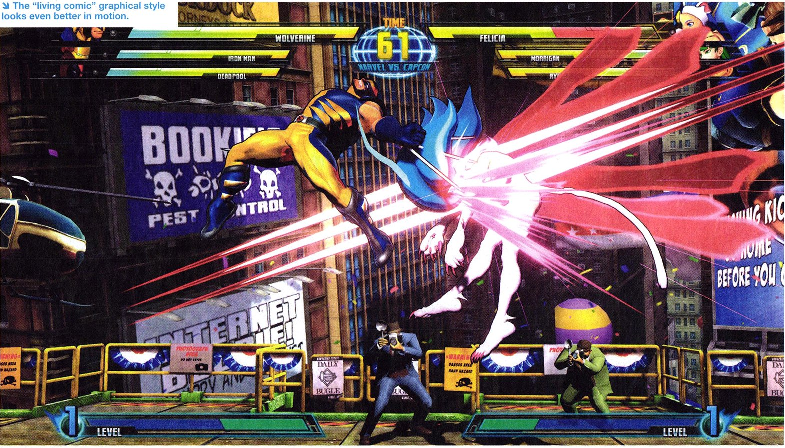
Let's try that again.

This time we play nice, hand over our weapons, and proceed to the casino floor where we lose a few credits playing slots, blackjack, and roulette. But soon enough, we start to itch for a little action and head out to the desert instead. There we meet a team of New California Republic soldiers and proceed to blow the heads off a few Caesar's Legion members using the companion command wheel and the good old slow-motion aiming system, V.A.T.S. The game immediately informs us that our reputation's taken a hit with the Caesar's Legion faction, but the NCR guys seem pretty pleased. Too bad they're next. | Scott Butterworth



↗ Melee weapons now come with special attacks just for V.A.T.S.





↘ The "living comic" graphical style looks even better in motion.

MARVEL vs. CAPCOM 3: FATE OF TWO WORLDS

Ready to be taken for a ride?

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring 2011 GENRE: Fighting PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Capcom

We've never had so much fun getting our ass kicked. In the process of walking us through the long-awaited sequel to superstar arcade fighter *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* (available for cheap on PSN), Capcom special advisor and all-around fighting game master Seth Killian beat us to an embarrassing pulp, but *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds* is such a chaotic spectacle that we couldn't help but enjoy ourselves anyway.

It's big and bright, fast and flashy, with sky-high super jumps, triple-digit combos, screen-filling super attacks, and backgrounds that burst into glowing technicolor explosions whenever characters unleash their hyper combos, all delivered with healthy dose of off-the-wall humor. How could we not be charmed? Don't be fooled, though: Just like its predecessor, there's plenty of substance behind all that style.

Team Marvel

Though perhaps less technically demanding than more serious fighting games such as *Street Fighter IV*, *Worlds* manages to be not only deep in its own right but also impressively unique, offering things that no other fighting franchise could. The simple control scheme utilizes just four attack buttons: light, medium, and heavy attacks (with no direct distinction between punches and kicks) plus an air combo button that instantly launches unguarded opponents into the air where they're vulnerable to further combos and other forms of humiliation.

Despite the lower number of attack buttons, the game still contains all the moves and maneuvers we've come to expect from our fighting games—including dashes, throws, projectiles, and supers. Many of them can even be executed with classic Capcom command inputs—like quarter-circle forward plus punch for a fireball, for instance. *Street Fighter* fans should feel right at home.

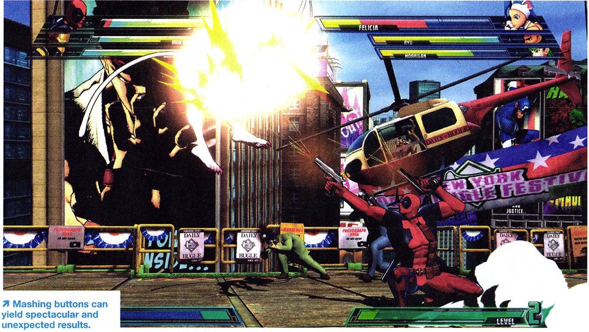
What really distinguishes *Worlds* from other fighting games are the two "Ally Assist" buttons that round out the traditional six-button format. See, rather than selecting a single fighter, players actually assemble a team of three from the 30-plus strong roster of beloved Capcom characters and iconic Marvel superheroes. Each of the Ally Assist buttons calls in a different teammate, either for a quick assisted attack or a more permanent swap that allows the previous character to recover a small amount of health while away from the fray.

Obviously this creates an opportunity for some serious strategizing both before and during the fight, but more importantly, it gives players a chance to execute hyper combos that involve all three fighters (assuming their hyper meters are full). They're devastating, spectacular, and, according to Killian, can get pretty creative.

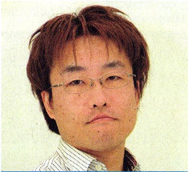
Or Team Capcom?

Sadly, we lacked the skill to pull off such a feat during our hands-on time, but we still managed to pound out a combo or two. Old favorites from *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* such as Wolverine and Iron Man immediately felt familiar, with recognizable moves and combos flowing effortlessly from them as we hammered the gamepad.

Newer characters proved to be a little more interesting. The burly Chris Redfield packs a veritable armory's worth of weaponry, assaulting his opponents with everything from shotguns to grenades, and Marvel's lovably annoying Deadpool showed off some fancy swordplay and a few



↗ **Mashing buttons can yield spectacular and unexpected results.**



↓ Fight Insight

While testing *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds*, we asked lead producer RYOTA NIITSUMA a few questions about his project.

How did you choose which characters to include in the game?
We finally narrowed it down to a cast of characters that we think suits the fighting game genre, and when you play the game, you're going to see all these little things that you recognize about the characters, all the little nuances and in-jokes, those will all be in there. But of course, the overall goal was to make sure they fit the whole fighting game atmosphere.

Was it tough to fit all these vastly different characters into one game?
It was pretty difficult to get these characters that aren't from a fighting game into a fighting game, so we had to look at the source material and just comb it for all these different finer movements and things like that. Ironically, *Devil May Cry's* Dante—that was the hardest one because he's got too many moves! He does too much stuff in his games, and so to try to pick and choose which ones we wanted to keep and how to keep them, that was actually more difficult.

***Worlds* seems to contain a fair amount of humor. Do you consider it an important aspect of the game?**
The *Vs.* series has always been more lighthearted, if you will, compared to *[Street Fighter]*. I think the humor has always been a key point in the *Vs.* series because it adds a new dimension to the fighting game, something you usually don't see. And because we are doing Marvel comics this time, a lot of those characters lend themselves to that type of humor, and I think it's important that you have that.

fourth-wall-breaking one-liners. Needless to say, most of the characters we tried were imbued with a similar level of creativity and ridiculousness.

We also explored a few of the game's new mechanics, such as the team aerial combo: After launching our opponent with the air combo button, we can then follow up with a series of chained aerial attacks that incorporates all three team members, though the combo uses just one button. The timing was tough, but once we got the pattern down, it became a useful go-to attack any time we sent an enemy skyward. Clearly Capcom has added a little method to *World's* madness, and Killian promised other similar mechanics will appear in the final game.

With its over-the-top style and tag-team insanity, *Worlds* looks like it could easily become a more accessible alternative to fighters like *Super Street Fighter IV.* At this point, we're just dying to know who else is on the roster. | Scott Butterworth

↙ **The character roster thus far includes Captain America, The Hulk, Chris Redfield, Wolverine, Ryu, Morrigan, Iron Man, Deadpool, Dante, and Felicia.**

TIME
29
MARVEL VS. CAPCOM
RYU
MORRIGAN
FELICIA
CAPTAIN AMERICA
WOLVERINE
IRON MAN
1
LEVEL
LEVEL
1

CHILD OF EDEN

(Re)birth of a Genre

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Q1 2011 **GENRE:** Shooter **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Q Entertainment

Leave it to developer Q Entertainment to coin its own genre of gaming: in its fact sheet, *Child of Eden* is bombastically categorized as a "multisensory shooter." Thing is, that's an apt description, and perhaps the only way to define the latest work from *Rez* creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi.

On the surface, Mizuguchi's new game shares a lot in common with its predecessor. Both are shooters set against abstract backdrops; both have big themes pulling us through the action; and both use music as an essential element. The soundtrack—this time, from Genki Rockets (which also produced music for Mizuguchi's *Lumines II*)—is enhanced by the on-screen action; line up a series of locked-on missiles, or fire off a round of rapid shots, and the sound effects bring the music to life with percussive claps and quick notes that seem to be perfectly in sync with the upbeat techno tunes.

The difference here: *Child of Eden* is a first-person shooter, as opposed to *Rez's* third-person vector character. All the better to further draw us in, which Mizuguchi reminds us is the goal of the game. Everything moves to the music, he told us as we were playing *Eden*—and we couldn't help but think he was referring to us, as we nodded and swayed to the beat, feeling like we were directly connected to this fantastical universe. Indeed, playing *Eden* is a lot like popping a pill and entering into a trancelike state. "It's a very trippy game," Mizuguchi smiles, "in a good sense."

Archives of Humanity

Eden is divided into distinct stages, called archives. Together, these archives are part of Project Lumi, which is aimed at reproducing a human personality by capturing memories of human and natural history. As the project draws close to completion, a virus attacks, and it's up to us to purify these archives to "restore hope and peace."

Though the number of the archives isn't final, we saw three of the half-dozen currently in progress (we're told there'll be more when the game ships). "Matrix" captures the digital mode of humanity, with appropriately sharp angles and, well, *Matrix*-y visuals. At the other extreme, "Beauty" showcased a more organic side of the game, with flower-like images flitting across a backdrop populated with muted, pastel-like colors. The most *Rez*-like level, though, was "Evolution," which follows a single cell all the way up to a massive, whale-like animal. This archive starts off sparse, with one green orb pulsing against a simple blue backdrop, but quickly starts populating with more orbs, followed by red, quivering pods that seem to capture the essence of life energy, albeit still fragile and tentative. Eventually we saw confident jellyfish, then haughty bird-like creatures swarming through the skies, up until our giant whale appeared. As we "purified" the behemoth by shooting targets in and around its body, lights exploded on screen and the massive life form seemed to emerge from the seas to find its way among the planets, the stars, the galaxies.

Move to the Beat

Playing *Eden* with a controller feels good, with the pad pulsing to the on-screen beat. Playing with motion control...well, neither Ubisoft nor Q Entertainment is willing to talk about Move support yet, but we're pretty sure it'll be there, if not at launch, soon after. We did, however, sit through a demo using Microsoft's Kinect, and found the sense of immersion with motion control even more enhanced. With Kinect, our right hand controls the lock-on missiles (a flick of the wrist fires the missiles), while our left hand can be used for rapid-fire. Or, if playing with one hand only, a simple clap will switch between weapons. Meanwhile, thrusting both hands in the air sets off a screen-clearing bomb.

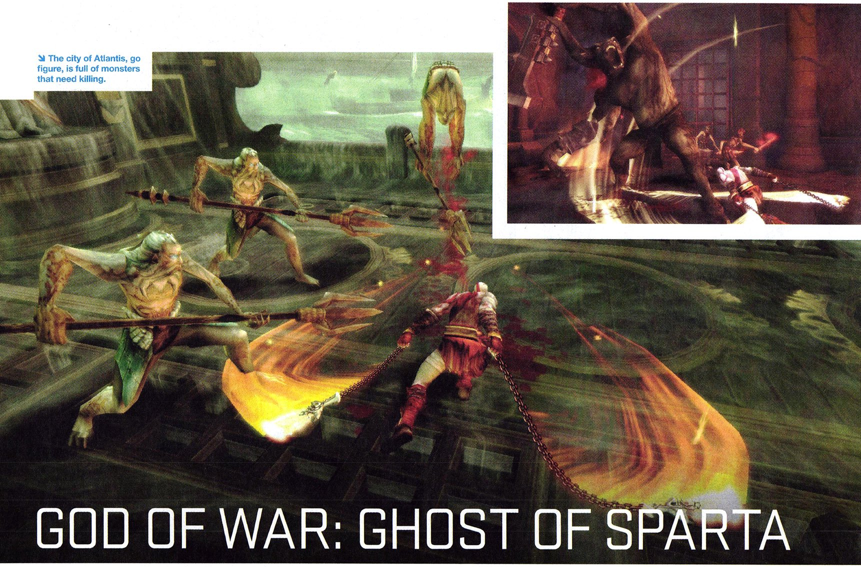
It's easy to see how this control scheme can transfer to Move, using two motion controllers in place of our hands, and how it could further benefit from both rumble and, perhaps, flashing colored lights in the balls atop the Move sticks. But even with a DualShock, *Child of Eden* is already shaping up to offer a mesmerizingly unique experience. | Gary Steinman

Genki Rockets
元気
ロケッツ I
Heavenly Star

↑ Lumi Alive

Far be it for us to quote Wikipedia, but sometimes it does the job. When describing the band Genki Rockets, it says: "The face of the group is 18-year-old Lumi, a fictional girl who was born in space on September 11, 2037, and has never been to Earth." In our demo, we spotted Lumi dancing toward the end of a level, so perhaps we'll see her on our little blue-green orb soon.

“ Playing *Eden* is a lot like popping a pill and entering into a trancelike state. ”



↘ **The city of Atlantis, go figure, is full of monsters that need killing.**

GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA

Kratos is angry. Again.

PSP AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Ready at Dawn

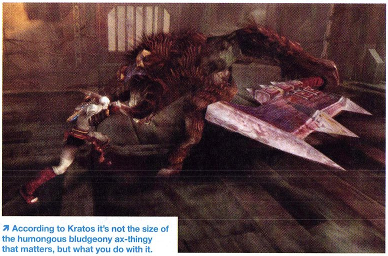
It's easy enough to toss around the word "epic," especially when it comes to *God of War*—but it's a bit tougher to get away with it when we're talking about it on the PSP. This is a handheld system, after all, and despite the fact that Kratos' previous PSP outing, *God of War: Chains of Olympus,* is one of the top-rated games on the system, the PSP's smaller screen seems out of step with the massive scale of this game franchise.

That is, until we saw the Scylla. The first boss Kratos encounters in *Ghost of Sparta* also happens to be bigger than any boss in *Olympus*. And this attempt to go bigger isn't limited to just the end-level encounters. Along with new locations and new weapons, *Sparta* aims to offer an even better-*looking* game than *Olympus,* a goal that's already on the way to being achieved in the opening level that we sampled.

Kratos' journey—which is set after the events of the original PS2 *God of War*—begins in Atlantis, a never-before-seen area in the franchise. Being a watery world, we see liquid everywhere: in the sea spray during the initial journey, and in sheets of water that cascade down the lost city's stone walls. Later, in a volcanic pass where we encounter Midas, we were equally impressed by the lighting and the lava effects—not to mention the brutality with which Kratos dealt with the cursed king.

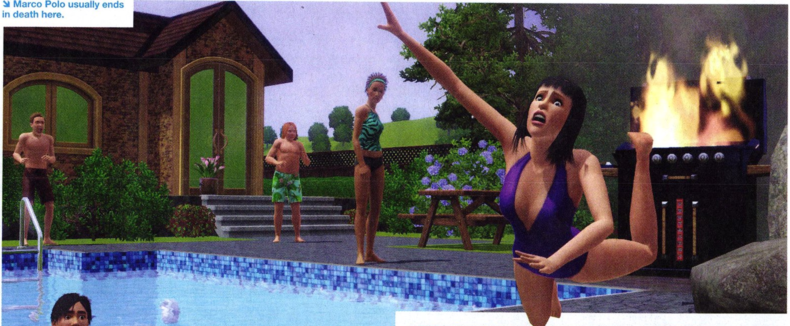
But graphics alone don't make a *God of War.* The gameplay is pretty much the same as its predecessors—light and heavy attacks, dodges and blocks, and magic and special moves. That's a good thing, since the formula works. New to *Sparta,* though, is the spear and shield, a weapon set with its own combat tree. Also new: the combat rush, in which Kratos charges at enemies, along with an assortment of *Sparta*-specific magic, including lightning blasts courtesy of the Eye of Atlantis relic.

What we've seen is already overstuffed with epic action, and that's just for starters. We're told *Sparta* will have double the number of bosses from *Olympus* along with all-new beasties from Greek mythology and retooled enemies such as the Minotaur. Most intriguing, though, is the promise of answers to questions left behind by all the other games, including subtle links to *God of War III.* Like why, exactly, Poseidon and Kratos hate each other so darn much. | Gary Steinman



↗ **According to Kratos it's not the size of the humongous bludgeony ax-thingy that matters, but what you do with it.**

↘ Marco Polo usually ends in death here.



THE SIMS 3

My so-called simulated life...

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Simulation PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: The Sims Studio

"Generally, it's just fun to watch the Sims freak out," Benjamin Bell says.

Bell, the executive producer for *The Sims 3,* has just dropped some bad karma on his little computer people. A formerly handsome dude now looks like roughly 10 miles of bad road, but at least he's not on fire…yet.

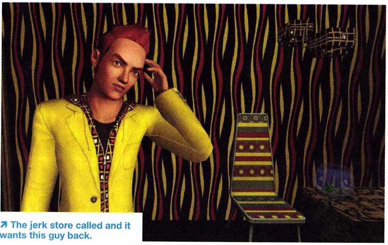
Karma is indeed a bitch. In the life simulator *The Sims 3,* it can also be a savior. After creating simulated people, giving them detailed personalities, and customizing their looks, we can create a world for them to exist in and lives to lead—and then either plague them with bad karma or speed them to greatness with good karma. Whether it's a cosmic curse or a gift of instant beauty, karma works wonders. Until, of course, the midnight hour approaches and the scales must be balanced.

"Karma will bite back," Bell says, "but I promise you it will be hilarious."

We can get overly creative with our Sims, giving them, say, a daredevil personality with a neurotic streak, or making them villainous but friendly and easily impressed. Then, we can unlock our inner Frank Lloyd Wright by creating masterful homes, palacial mansions, or, if we prefer, dilapidated crap shacks. From there, the game opens wide to create a goofy simulation wherein the Sims eat, sleep, go to work, die in fires, travel to distant places, get scared by poltergeists, perform the sex act ("we call it 'whoo-hoo!,'" Bell says), go to the bathroom, watch TV, throw rocking parties, and do everything that a normal—or decidedly abnormal—life entails.

This outing marks the debut of *The Sims* on the PlayStation 3, and Electronic Arts will be further pushing the series by allowing us to upload and share our creations via PSN. We can then, in turn, download all the game's hottest user-created goodies, including cars, clothing, Sims, and houses.

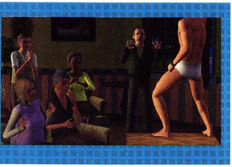
Life begins anew in October, and all may be well with the (simulated) world. | Greg Orlando



↗ The jerk store called and it wants this guy back.

➔ Karmic Alignment

While it may be more fun to smite Sims, it's probably more beneficial to grant their wishes with good karma. By fulfilling in-game challenges and satisfying our Sims' needs, we can buy all manner of goodies for our not-quite-existent towns.



ROCK BAND 3

Meet the world's most epic music instructor

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Rhythm/Music **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts/MTV Games **DEVELOPER:** Harmonix

We've always believed rhythm games could improve our musical abilities. And it's true…to a degree. Certainly they improve our sense of rhythm and timing and our ability to operate our hands independently, but beyond these extremely basic skills, games such as *Rock Band* couldn't bring us any closer to becoming real-world rock stars.

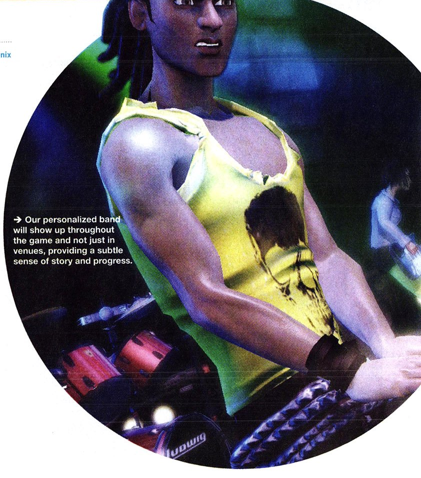
Rock Band 3 changes that with a vengeance by introducing an entirely new way to play rhythm games: Pro mode, which, on the highest difficulty, matches the music note for note. The game's sophisticated new instruments—a full-sized guitar featuring 102 buttons, a three-cymbal add-on pack for the drum kit, and an all-new two-octave keyboard—allow developer Harmonix to author tracks perfectly mirroring what the musicians are playing in each song.

This might sound intimidating at first (102 buttons?! Impossible!), but just like *Rock Band's* traditional gameplay, Pro mode offers multiple levels of difficulty that naturally scale each track. Even on easy, players will experience a realistic (though simplified) version of the actual song, and as their skills develop, the game adds chords and more complex note patterns.

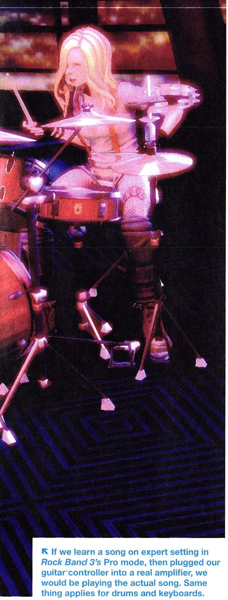
The game also comes armed with a vast array of teaching tools, including unique tutorials for every song that select difficult sections, slow them down, and allow players to loop and practice them. It'll even teach players basic chord structures—the foundation of any musical education.

Frets on Fire

Unfortunately, we weren't able to attend *Band 3's* school of rock before taking Pro mode for a test drive, but we still fared well playing guitar on Joan Jett's "I Love Rock 'n' Roll." In fact, plucking the correct string rather than simply bashing the

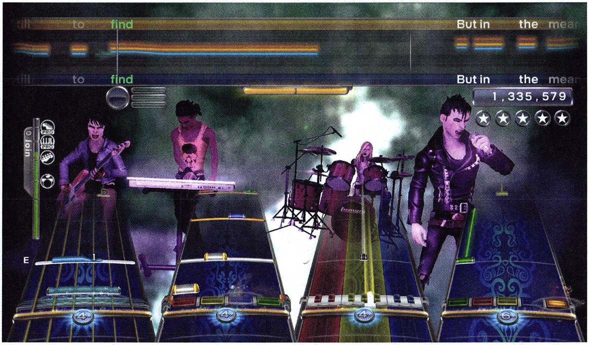


➔ Our personalized band will show up throughout the game and not just in venues, providing a subtle sense of story and progress.

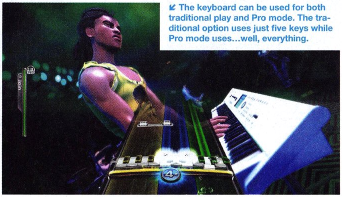


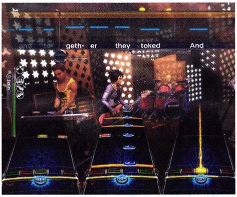
↖ If we learn a song on expert setting in *Rock Band 3's* Pro mode, then plugged our guitar controller into a real amplifier, we would be playing the actual song. Same thing applies for drums and keyboards.

↓ Pro Mode distinguishes between cymbal and tom notes. It's a subtle but hugely satisfying difference for drummers.



↙ The keyboard can be used for both traditional play and Pro mode. The traditional option uses just five keys while Pro mode uses...well, everything.





strum bar proved to be a welcome challenge after years of the same old rhythm gameplay, and we found the numbered notes (which denote frets) to be immediately intuitive rather than overwhelming. On medium, at least.

Once we got cocky, the Harmonix team threw us into Ozzy Osbourne's "Crazy Train" on expert, and even our real-world guitar prowess wasn't enough to save us from the lightning-fast onslaught of notes. But despite our failure, we enjoyed the experience. It didn't feel impossible; we just weren't accustomed to that level of play yet.

Lucky for us, the game was ready to help, providing everything from an easy-to-grasp shorthand for every chord (all of which appear as differently-shaped bars) to an on-screen indicator displaying the position of our hands on the guitar neck. After just three songs, we could already feel ourselves catching on to the game's unique visual vocabulary, and we trust that, in time, our brains will learn to quickly compute the on-screen images into useable information for our hands.

Classic Rock

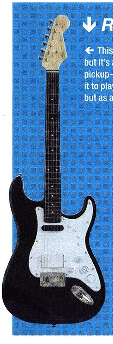
Of course, Pro mode isn't all *Band 3* has to offer. Even if we were to discount Pro mode entirely, the game would still feature more improvements over *Rock Band 2* than *Band 2* provided over the original game. And yes, the traditional five-button, scrolling note gameplay still serves as the standard mode of play.

The disc contains 83 new tracks, many of which—such as Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody"—are perfectly suited to the game's other new big features: three-part vocal harmonies and keyboard parts (which can actually be played on a guitar, if desired). Want a seven-person band? No sweat. Naturally, all previous *Rock Band* music—including all downloadable content and on-disc songs—will be compatible with *Band 3.* Although it won't all be playable in Pro mode, the game's slick new sorting tools will make it far easier to manage the song library.

For even more convenience, *Band 3* allows band members to drop in or out of a performance at will or even change their difficulty levels without interrupting the song, just like *Guitar Hero 5's* Party mode. Plus, the revamped Career mode now allows for an even deeper investment, with subtle, implied storytelling and over 700 goals to make every tour unique.

Needless to say, we were quite impressed by *Rock Band 3.* It may not turn us all into full-fledged musicians, but it's a darn cool teaching tool that could easily redefine the rhythm/music genre by adding tangible real-world value to a videogame experience. | Scott Butterworth

↓ *Rock Band's* New Guitars



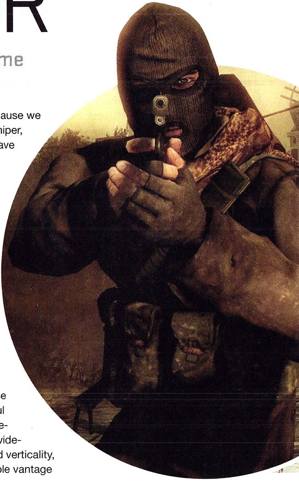
← This Fender-manufactured Squier Stratocaster looks like a standard guitar, but it's also a videogame controller. Six real strings, tuning knobs, a working pickup—plug this bad boy into an amp, and it actually plays. So of course, using it to play *Rock Band 3* felt amazing. We probably wouldn't go play a gig with it, but as a first guitar (and a controller), it's brilliant.

→ Surprisingly, the less expensive Wireless Fender Mustang controller feels nearly as great. Though 102 is a startling number of buttons, rocking out on this plastic axe felt completely natural, even when we tried to tackle chords. Manufacturer Mad Catz and developer Harmonix have clearly done their homework.

MEDAL OF HONOR

Fighting a war of current affairs, one dropped shell at a time

PS3 AVAILABLE: **October** GENRE: **Shooter** PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** DEVELOPER: **EALA / DICE (Multiplayer)**



It's difficult to discuss *Medal of Honor's* multiplayer without acknowledging *Battlefield: Bad Company 2.* Never mind that DICE is developing the multiplayer side of *Honor*…it's that the *Company 2* developer flat out steals its own ideas to create another incredible online experience. As a result, *Honor* serves as an addition to what we already enjoy in our modern warfare; rather than attempting to differentiate itself from the market's myriad multiplayer shooters, it invites and embraces established ideas. And it makes for a damn fine online experience.

The most noticeable similarity is in the class structure and progression. Each class has its expected advantages, like the sniper's long-range weaponry, the special ops soldier's rocket launcher, or the rifleman's grenade launcher attachment. As players earn experience points through kills, headshots, assists, completing objectives, and countless other actions, their stock soldier unlocks new weapons and attachments. Instead of opening up a wide stable of unlockable items, *Honor* focuses on a single, linear branch. While that might sound lame to start, we loved deliberately working toward a single goal. It reminded us of saving our allowance to finally buy that awesome new toy. In this case, the new toy is an 870 MCS (Modular Combat Shotgun).

Class Actions

As with *Bad Company 2,* class-specific experience stays within that class. This adds another layer of personal satisfaction to the unlocking because it encourages players to tune three types of tactically different classes in different ways. The more a person plays a certain class, the more flexibility he's permitted within it. Because we primarily played as a sniper, for instance, we now have the required gear to pick enemies off from afar, or to sneak deep into the thick of the battle. We just swap our gear for the situation at hand.

Because of *Honor's* fabulous map designs, we found ourselves swapping gear, and classes, with almost every respawn. We're especially fond of the ruined city of Kabul, an outstandingly diverse deathmatch map. Kabul cleverly combines close-quarters combat with wide-open areas, multi-tiered verticality, and useful but vulnerable vantage

War is never pretty, but sometimes it comes with experience point bonuses.

points throughout the demolished city. Matches here are fast, and firefights spread from one side of the city to the next in the blink of an eye. Heland Valley, on the other hand, is a massive objective-based map where the offense pushes its way up hills to destroy key enemy checkpoints. Smart defenders can make their enemies miserable by using the high ground, leading to intense back-and-forth nail biters.

It was here that we discovered how to access chain rewards. As with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2,* we're rewarded for consecutive kills and scoring a lot of points. Once we've chained enough points together, we're presented with two options: an offensive or a defensive bonus. If we're feeling selfish and want to risk not earning any extra points, we can call in a mortar strike or drop a missile on an enemy base for a potentially huge payoff. On the other hand, if we're in an altruistic mood, we can be instantly rewarded in smaller sums for activating team-wide radar or replenishing ammo.

Call of Honor

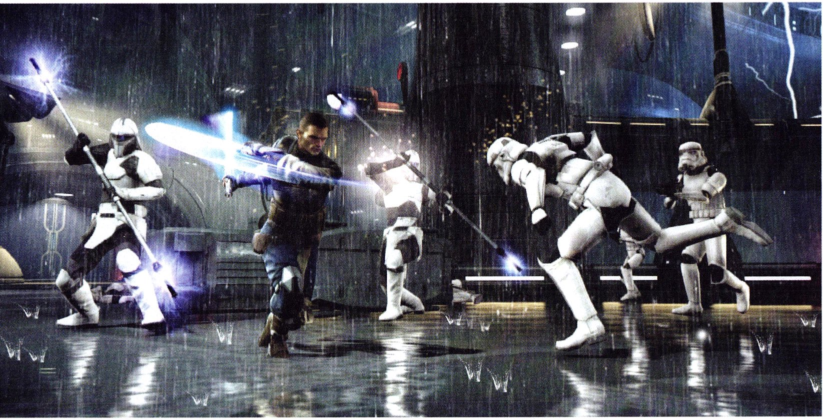
Despite a valiant attempt at some interesting ideas, *Medal of Honor: Airborne* couldn't escape the stigma and stagnation of World War II games. Now, 11 years after its original release, Electronic Arts is hitting reset and separating the series from its heritage. As with *Call of Duty* before it, *Medal of Honor* is abandoning WWII for a contemporary setting. Even its title is an attempt at a fresh start: It scraps numerical nomenclature and indicative subtitles for history-ignoring simplicity. If our six hours spent steeped in its multiplayer are any indication of what's to come later this year, we're waving goodbye to the past and welcoming the future with open arms. | Mitch Dyer

↑ Back to the Front

Just in case modern warfare is too much of a bummer, Electronic Arts is shipping a PlayStation-exclusive special edition of *Medal of Honor* that includes the decade-old PS2 game *Medal of Honor: Frontline,* a World War II classic that will be fully remastered in glorious high definition.

Medal of Honor reminds us that fashionable eyewear is a modern war essential.

PlayStation Gallery



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Jedi-Slaying PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: LucasArts

Lesser men might be deterred by death, but not subject 1157 aka Starkiller. Back from the dead (although LucasArts suggests he might be a clone), Vader's former "secret" apprentice must travel the galaxy using his Force powers to stomp suckers while simultaneously discovering the truth regarding his return. This time, Marek wields two lightsabers at once, and can use new powers such as the Jedi mind trick to befuddle his foes into fighting for him. | Greg Orlando

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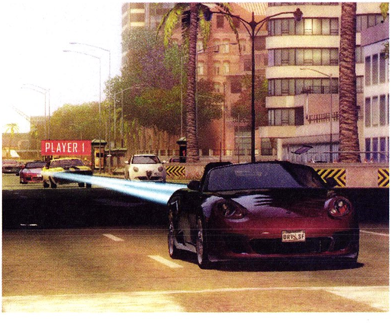
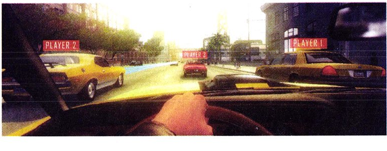
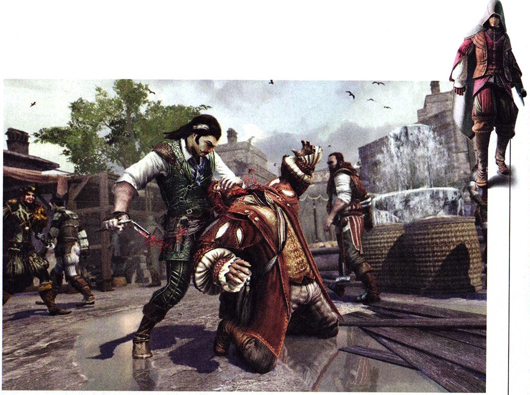


Driver: San Francisco

PS3 AVAILABLE: November GENRE: Driving PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Reflections

Our first multiplayer spin behind the latest *Driver* game's wheel revealed movie-style car chase action reminiscent of *Bullitt* and *The French Connection.* We jockeyed with rivals to accrue the most time within the target car's trailing light stream as it sped and veered through traffic on the congested streets of downtown San Francisco. The *Matrix*-like "shift" mechanic allowed us to instantly transfer to any other vehicle in the vicinity if we lost the trail, crashed, or were otherwise viciously undermined by competitors. | Roger Burchill





Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood

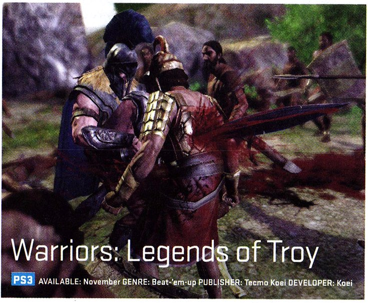
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** November **GENRE:** Action/Stealth **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Montreal

The enemy could be anyone. In *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood's* multiplayer, we adopt the appearance of generic non-player characters such as courtesans and noblemen and enter a city space brimming with similar civilians. The game offers a few tools to help distinguish clueless bystanders from actual opponents wielding hidden blades—like a directional indicator that fills as we draw closer to our targets—but we still had to move carefully to avoid giving ourselves away, which made our recent hands-on time a paranoia-inducing experience. Trying to blend in with a crowd has never been a more intense gameplay experience. | Scott Butterworth

Fist of the North Star: Ken's Rage

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Beat-'em-up **PUBLISHER:** Tecmo Koei **DEVELOPER:** Tecmo Koei

In a post-apocalyptic world, there's not much else to do but use superhuman martial arts skills to punch bad guys 100 times in five seconds, or hit them so they grow huge humps before exploding in a spray of blood and gore. *Fist of the North Star: Ken's Rage* offers outlandish beat-'em-up action modeled after a popular Japanese comic book, and it might be the most stupid fun to be had after the world's atomic demise. | GO



Warriors: Legends of Troy

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** November **GENRE:** Beat-'em-up **PUBLISHER:** Tecmo Koei **DEVELOPER:** Koei

Heralded as the *Dynasty Warriors* game for people who hate the *Dynasty Warriors* series, *Warriors: Legends of Troy* is an authentic recreation of the fictional Trojan War (if said war was fought between one lone Greek or Trojan and an opposing army). *Troy* offers endless slaughter and strategic sword-and-shield combat. Here, using a weapon to break down an enemy's defenses is a good idea, topped only by soaking the screen with enemy blood during a powerful fury attack. | GO

LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Adventure **PUBLISHER:** LucasArts **DEVELOPER:** Traveller's Tales

Clones and blockheads return to the battlefield once again, but this time the art style has been reworked into something entirely delicious, and space battles now allow players to land inside an enemy ship, wreak havoc, and then get the hell out before the inevitable boom. There's also new cooperative attacks allowing clone troopers to, say, pin enemies down with grappling hooks in order to allow kindly Yoda to slice them to ribbons. | GO

Dead Space 2

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** January 2011 **GENRE:** Action/Adventure **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** Visceral Games

Protagonist Isaac Clarke's career progression from engineer to grizzled warrior looks on track in this survival-horror-in-space sequel, but perhaps he's better suited for butchery or hosting a Slap Chop infomercial as slicing-and-dicing is *Dead Space 2's* requisite skill. An advanced mining suit and new weapons such as the impaling Javelin gun should come in handy against the regurgitating "Pukers" and the swarming demon-like "Pack," but Isaac's going to need something bigger than a meat cleaver for the two other colossal monstrosities we've seen in the game. | Roger Burchill

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Action/Adventure **PUBLISHER:** Konami **DEVELOPER:** MercurySteam

Finally, a game that lets us punch werewolves in the face! Well, that and lash them with a classic *Castlevania* whip using *God of War*-style attack combos and magic spells—which can be upgraded and combined as we progress through the dark, medieval world of Gabriel Belmont. In our hands-on time, the two-button combat system was familiar but fun, and the world itself—populated by mythical monsters and enormous *Shadow of the Colossus*-style bosses—had a feel all its own. | Scott Butterworth

Yakuza 4

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Spring 2011 **GENRE:** Adventure **PUBLISHER:** Sega **DEVELOPER:** Sega

The goal with *Yakuza 4* is to offer the most comprehensive localization ever for the series. That means everything (aside from one obscure minigame) will be in the North American edition, including all the extracurricular activities at the hostess clubs. As for the game itself, Kazuma is back, but he now shares the stage with three other characters: a cop who bends the rules, an escaped convict, and a loan shark, each with his own story and fighting style. | Gary Steinman

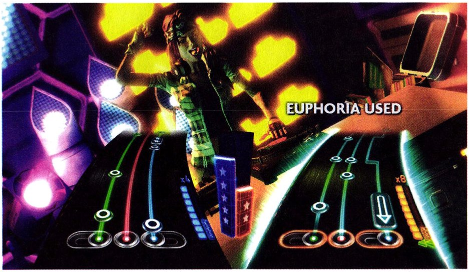
Brink

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Feb. 2011 **GENRE:** First-Person Shooter **PUBLISHER:** Bethesda **DEVELOPER:** Splash Damage

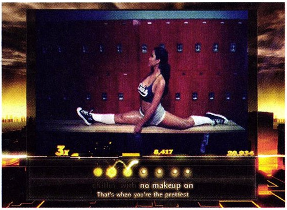
Ever pumped an enemy full of bullets only to have a teammate swoop in for the kill, or been resurrected (and immediately killed again) in the middle of a firefight? Don't worry, in addition to loads of deeply customizable weapons and soldiers, *Brink* offers clever solutions to these and other common multiplayer problems. From experience points for individual bullets to revive-when-ready syringes from medics, *Brink's* story-driven multiplayer missions reward players for teamwork without hindering their personal character progression. Plus, it's fun to shoot people. Trust us. | SB

DJ Hero 2

PS3 **AVAILABLE** Fall **GENRE:** Rhythm/Music **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** FreeStyleGames



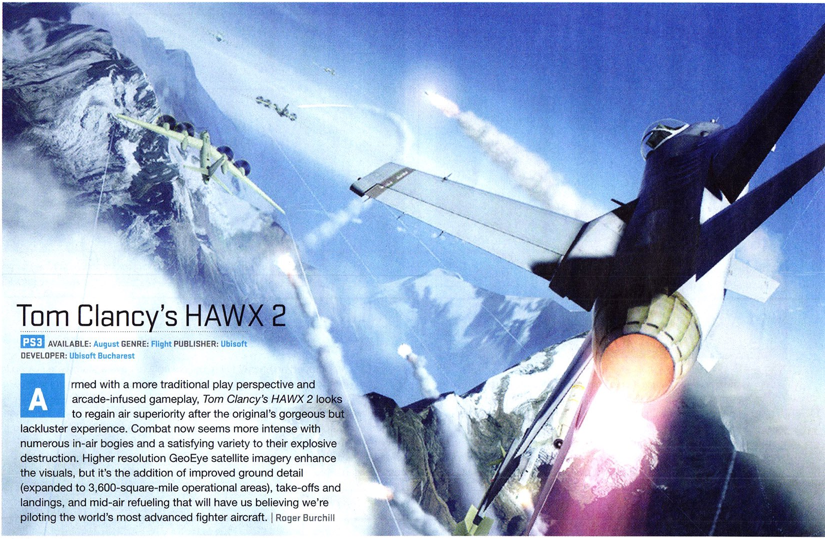
While its basic beat-matching formula remains the same, *DJ Hero 2* offers a few new ways to take our turntables for a spin: The 70-plus new mashups in the game (many created by celebrity DJs) contain freestyle sections that let players scratch and remix creatively. Samples are now taken directly from the mix being played, so they'll likely feel more authentic than the pre-canned samples in the original game. And all new competitive multiplayer options introduce a few new mechanics such as the slick rewind feature. | SB



Def Jam Rapstar

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:** Rhythm/Music **PUBLISHER:** Konami **DEVELOPER:** 4mm Games

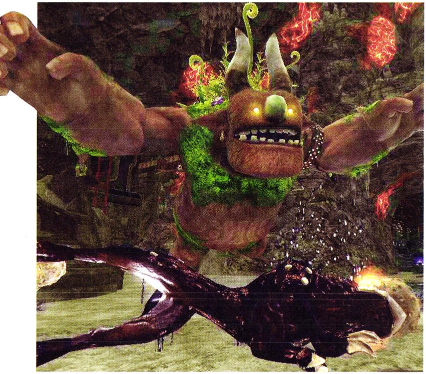
There are sucka MCs, and they need to be schooled. Thus ends our direct knowlege of the wooly world of competitive rapping. That's bound to change with Konami's sing-along game *Def Jam Rapstar,* which offers a dope and not whack complement of 40 songs from, among others: Biz Markie, Outkast, Salt-n-Pepa, and Ice Cube. Players can freestyle rap, too, and compete in online battles via PSN. Word to someone's mom. | Greg Orlando

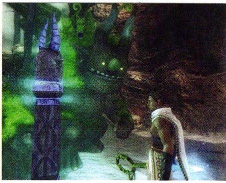


Tom Clancy's HAWX 2

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** August **GENRE:** Flight **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Bucharest

Armed with a more traditional play perspective and arcade-infused gameplay, *Tom Clancy's HAWX 2* looks to regain air superiority after the original's gorgeous but lackluster experience. Combat now seems more intense with numerous in-air bogies and a satisfying variety to their explosive destruction. Higher resolution GeoEye satellite imagery enhance the visuals, but it's the addition of improved ground detail (expanded to 3,600-square-mile operational areas), take-offs and landings, and mid-air refueling that will have us believing we're piloting the world's most advanced fighter aircraft. | Roger Burchill

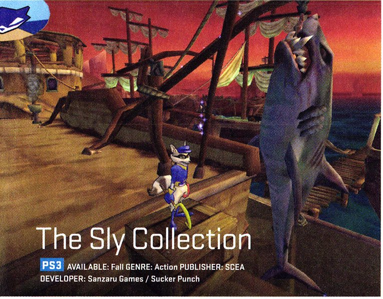




Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** November **GENRE:** Adventure **PUBLISHER:** Namco Bandai **DEVELOPER:** Game Republic

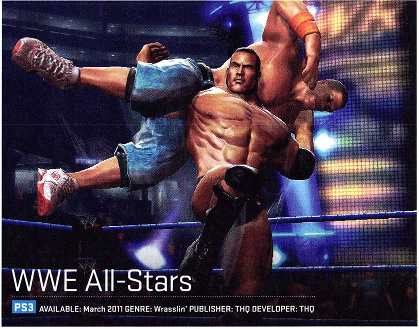
A buddy role-playing adventure with copious amounts of crushing, *Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom* takes place in a fantastical world where foul tar-based creatures are gumming up the works. Majin's a monster, his pal is a human, and together the wacky odd couple can fight, sneak, and solve puzzles. As Majin's abilities expand so do those of his partner, and this *Forsaken Kingdom* has a great deal of charm to it. | Greg Orlando



The Sly Collection

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** SCEA **DEVELOPER:** Sanzaru Games / Sucker Punch

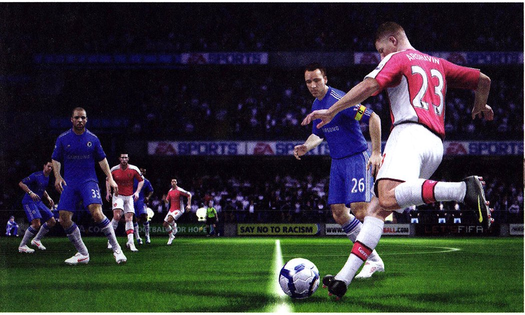
Before *inFamous,* developer Sucker Punch made a name for itself on PS2 with three of the best pure platformers on the system. With tight controls, great characters, and gorgeous graphics, this trio of games delivered a lighthearted mix of hopping and bopping, along with thrilling stealth and thievery. Now all three *Sly* games have been remastered—and at least one *(Sly 3)* will also be in 3D. We played them recently, and the graphics and gameplay still hold up beautifully. | Gary Steinman



WWE All-Stars

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** March 2011 **GENRE:** Wrasslin' **PUBLISHER:** THQ **DEVELOPER:** THQ

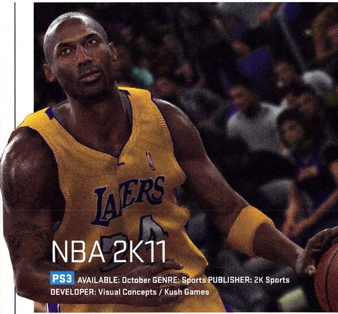
Wrestling is the circus, if the circus blew up. *WWE All-Stars* is like the circus if it married the Jerry Springer Show, had overloud children, and then the family exploded. Comically over-muscled wrasslers such as John Cena and The Rock are featured here in a combo-heavy fighting game extravaganza. Players can chain together various holds, throws, and slams, before leaping exaggeratedly into the air to perform a devastating finishing move on their pencil-necked geek foe. | GO



FIFA Soccer 11

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:** Sports **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports **DEVELOPER:** EA Canada

Viewing a *FIFA 10* match, we often mistook it for the real thing. But scrutinizing a *FIFA 11* game against *FIFA 10* revealed new and additional layers of realism: Intermediate defenders reacted and attempted to play on passes in their vicinity; the skill and consistency of in-game players more accurately reflected their real-world counterparts; and fielders responded to both spacing and ball trajectory on corner kicks. The focus on gameplay polish and an expanded roster of player-model types should make the beautiful game even more beautiful in *11.* | RB



NBA 2K11

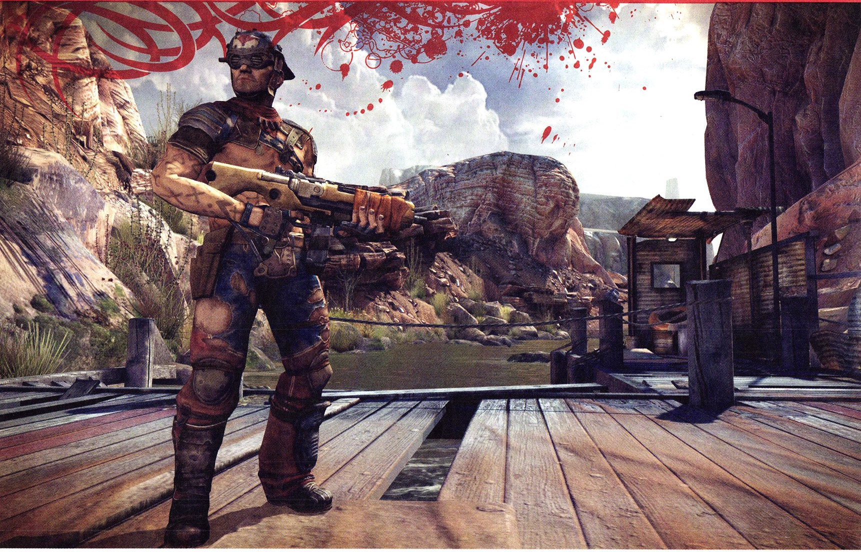
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:** Sports **PUBLISHER:** 2K Sports **DEVELOPER:** Visual Concepts / Kush Games

If image won championships, *NBA 2K11*—with Michael Jordan adorning its cover and a slick TV broadcast-style presentation—could start sizing itself for a ring, but there's a reason why they, and we, play the games. The renewed focus on player animations running at 60fps certainly exhibits increased smoothness, but we've yet to go one-on-one with the simplified, more intuitive revamp of the control system. But the biggest question is: Will Jordan make an appearance in the game? 2K isn't saying—yet. | RB

PS3 | **Available:** TBD 2011 | **Publisher:** Bethesda Softworks | **Developer:** id Software

GE

Have gun, will travel: id Software mixes one part driving, one part talking, and two parts shooting in what might be the best-looking first-person shooter ever. Read our exclusive first taste of the results. ***BY EVAN SHAMOON***



We're sipping French roast and chai tea from a rather space-age coffee machine when id Software's creative director Tim Willits casually informs us that an asteroid called Apophis will pass by Earth around the year 2036.

"The US government has said this thing is very small—that it's not gonna hit us, and not to worry about it," he explains. "But the Russians think otherwise, and they're planning on sending a probe into space to intercept it."

This is not only the basis for a game's narrative, but is also, apparently, reality.

Wait, really? "Go CNN it," Willits says—which we later do, confirming his seemingly implausible story. But it's not this tale of heavenly impact that brought us to Mesquite, Texas—a small city in Dallas County that's home to, among other things: the Mesquite Championship Rodeo, one of the largest movie theaters in the world (30 screens!), and, housed inside an industrial office complex, id Software. Instead, we're sitting safely ensconced in an air-conditioned conference room, staring at a mammoth television set, about to begin our world-exclusive playtest of a game this fabled studio has now been working on for some four years. They call it *Rage.*

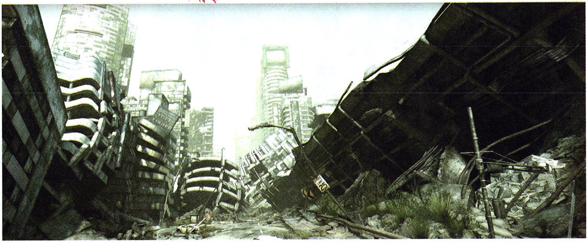
Rage's story begins after impact and the subsequent fallout. Enter: mutants, high-level conspiracies by an organization called The Authority, and one hell of an overall post-apocalypse (see sidebar). Care for some napalm this fine morning?

This asteroid was not, however, where *Rage* itself actually began. Instead, its basis was in another form of alien technology: technical director John Carmack's brain. "We had actually started on another game that followed the paradigm of our past titles, but John's technology opened a lot of doors for us and we shifted to *Rage,"* explains Willits. "He had downloaded this publicly available data from NASA, a huge amount of texture data for the U.S." Carmack plugged said data into his virtual texturing technology (Google it), and gave the guys a demo: He could stream terabytes of geographical data into extremely detailed environments, essentially allowing for exponentially larger environments than those found in, say, *Doom 3*—an exponentially larger world than id had ever attempted before, in fact.

"From here, one thing became clear to us: players would have to be able to drive cars," Willits says. "And obviously, the cars would have to have guns on them." This is the way the guys at id Software think.

And so it was: *Rage* is now set inside a sprawling, massive world, one where post-Apophis humanity is working to rebuild itself while bandit gangs, mutants, and the Authority are all dead set on making you, well, dead. And yes, there are cars…with guns on them. It's the first title id has built from the ground up for consoles, and the company's first new intellectual property in 10-plus years. It's also, crucially, the first game built with the company's new id Tech 5 engine, and the company's first PS3 title developed in house. That's a lot of firsts.

APOCALYPSE SOON-ISH



"People always ask, why do a post-apocalyptic setting?" says *Rage's* lead designer Matt Hooper. "From the design side, we've always had a lot of ideas; like everybody, we play a lot of games, read a lot of books, watch a lot of movies. But it can be hard to break out of fan's expectations when working with an established franchise. So I think for Tim [Willits] and I, the ability to come out with a new IP and do all the things we wanted to do, that's a big deal for us. To me, it's just like movies and books—it's a neat setting to do whatever the hell you want to. It's an excuse to do all the bits of fiction you want to do. It means we're gonna take the familiar and twist it in our own unique way, and give the player something interesting."

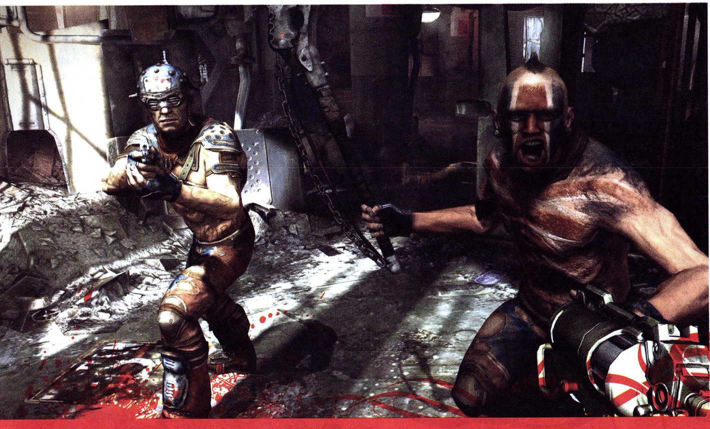
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
RAGE

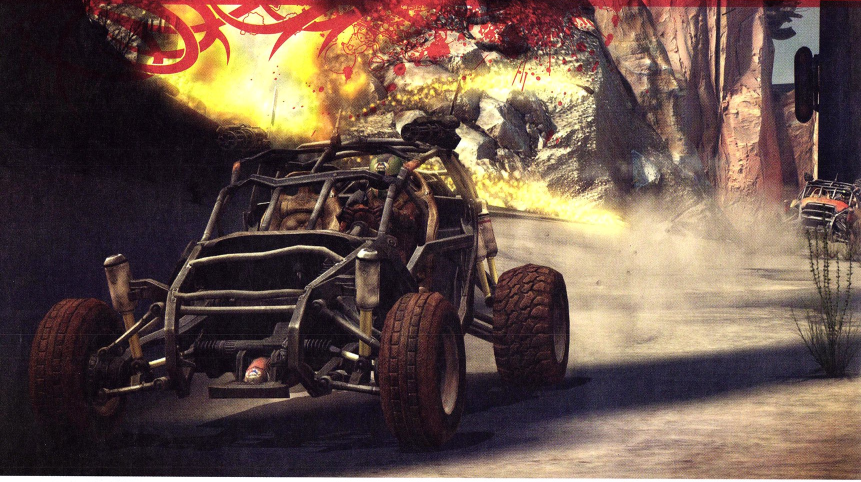
THE WASTED CLAN

WHO ARE THEY? These bandits might not be smart, but they've got a lot of moxie. When not modifying vehicles or making moonshine, they're tussling among themselves.

WHERE YOU'LL ENCOUNTER THEM
Almost anywhere—although they prefer industrial areas for ready access to supplies and tools.

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE
Wasted are more likely to grab a burning club and bash someone over the head than to hide in the dark and take potshots, so stay out of melee range. Keep alert, because they'll come fast and hard from any direction.





The *Rage* experience is broken up into three distinct modes of operation: driving, interacting, and shooting. When we initially jump in, we're on foot, alone in a sprawling desert wasteland, doing little more than getting our bearings.

The desert sun sears from overhead, casting long shadows across the craggy cliffs above and the patches of red rock all around us. The sparse foliage sways idly in the wind, while shallow pools of water reflect our surroundings. We begin to walk before Willits points to the unattended dune buggy just beside us. "Well, I guess you can walk if you want to," he says with a chuckle.

No thanks. We climb in, and the technical tour-de-force continues as we peel out, a buttery frame rate bringing the vehicle's sense of speed to life. The intricately textured environment speeds by before our eyes, the vastness of *Rage's* world becoming steadily more apparent.

We eventually arrive at the entrance to one of the game's outlying communities, Wellspring—a small, dusty town that's home to a variety of survivors and which serves as the main hub for the game's first half. Wellspring is a shantytown of sorts, its particular brand of post-apocalypse most reminiscent of *Mad Max.* Here, the grimy streets are littered with rusted vending machines, all manner of graffiti, and refurbished neon signs that barely maintain their structural integrity but still glow. A hunched grease monkey mans the town's automotive shop, a sexy bartender serves drinks, and a sheriff does his best to keep up the appearance of law and order. What immediately strikes us is the sheer amount of visual detail—everywhere. The characters are superbly modeled and animated, even those simply puttering about and tending to their duties. Wherever we look, the environment has its own stories to tell: small cracks in the walls, smoke curling into the air from an abandoned cigarette, ripped posters and ragged comic books. Signs with health warnings and various advertisements are often amended with handwritten scrawls. The density of detail makes *Red Dead Redemption's* border towns look sparse by comparison.

But enough rubbernecking, pardner: There's more pressing matters to attend to in these here parts. After a few conversations with the locals—all of the game's narrative cinematics take place inside the game engine—we find ourselves engaged in a series of buggy races. A good way, perhaps, to get a bit more familiar with the game's four-wheeled component. In *Rage*, racing is an enterprise; it's here that we can win cash, which we'll use in town to purchase upgrades to our ride. A necessary endeavor, it seems: Simply crossing the landscape, littered as it is with mutants, bandits, and other lowlife scum, will require not only a capable driver, but a vehicle with the offensive firepower and defensive heft to survive.

Fortunately, even at this early stage, the racing is fun. Really fun. It feels more like a game unto itself than a lesser subcomponent. While we don't get a chance to try out any of the mounted weapons, the racing itself is breakneck, and the track design allows for multiple routes and varied strategies. The closest point of reference is probably Sony's own *MotorStorm*; this is arcade-style driving, grounded in realistic physics but decidedly off-the-rails in intensity. Turbo boosts are the order of the day, and tracks are littered with big air jumps and hard turns. After a good 45 minutes of passing the controller around and comparing finish times, we're left asking the question: "Is *Rage* actually a racing game?"

WHY ID MATTERS

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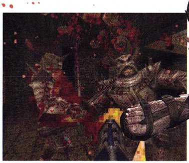
100%
200%
AMMO
HEALTH
ARMS
ARMOR



If you haven't heard of id Software, here's a brief history lesson. These are the guys who invented the first-person shooter, and they've been churning out landmark titles in the genre for some 17 years. *Wolfenstein 3D, Doom, Quake:* These are the games of id, and *Rage* is the next franchise in line. While most of its titles have been ported to every device in existence (see: *Doom* on Atari Jaguar, *Quake II* on HTML5, *Wolfenstein* on your refrigerator's touchscreen), *Rage* is the first game the company has built from the ground up to be played on PS3. "We finally get a direct handshake with console owners with *Rage,*" id president Todd Hollenshead says. "We're not going through an intermediary this time."

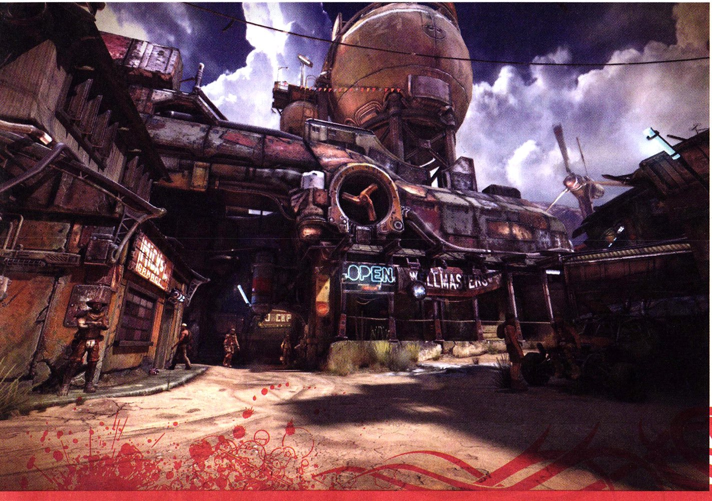
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
RAGE
100 GAMES 24 HOURS!

THE GHOST CLAN

WHO ARE THEY?
Fearless—and feared by almost all other clans—the Ghosts believe in the supernatural and engage in ghastly blood rituals in an attempt to guarantee their acceptance in the afterlife.

WHERE YOU'LL ENCOUNTER THEM
In dark, forgotten places where they decorate their surroundings with graffiti and grisly trophies of their victims.

DON'T MONKEY AROUND
Ghosts attack with grace, speed, and brutality. Stay sharp in their territory—these combatants jump, crawl, and navigate their surroundings like world-class gymnasts.



Soon thereafter, our question is answered: No. When given the reigns to one the game's on-foot levels, it becomes abundantly clear that *Rage* is, more than anything, an FPS.

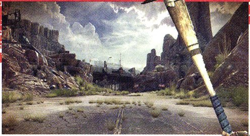
It's a bit hazy *why* we're here in these dark tunnels, with this semi-automatic shotgun in our hands—all we know is that we're in the Shrouded Clan's hideout, and we have to blow stuff up while surviving an onslaught of tech-savvy human tanks—but the *how* is abundantly clear: Shoot, run, and shoot some more. This is what id does and has always done, and its 17 years of experience begin to really show. The controls feel solid, the shotgun kicks like a mule, and once again, the visuals are second to none. Carmack and his team have harnessed the power of the PS3 as well as anyone.

The controls are immediately familiar and that's no accident. "We tried to engineer the first-person controls much like *Call of Duty,* because when something sells 20 million copies, you don't move the jump button," says Willits.

While *Rage* isn't overly concerned with cover, it's got a significant strategic element. Weapon selection is the first of many choices we can make in these open but directed levels—we've got a wide range of standard weaponry, along with alternate ammo and a few quirky items like the sublimely satisfying boomerang-like "wingsticks." Turning the Shrouded's tech against them is another option: We pick up their remote-controlled bomb cars, for example, and use them to not only destroy explosive caches, but to perform recon and clear out clusters of enemies ahead. Once again, the control is a highlight: the RC cars handle just like the game's human-scale buggies, so there's no learning curve at all. Best yet, we can learn how to engineer these bomb cars themselves—along with a range of other items like turrets and sentry bots—and build them on the fly with scavenged parts.

Later, we enter the wells beneath the town of Wellspring to clear out members of the Ghost clan intent on poisoning the populace. What impressed us most: How different these pale, tattooed assassins are from the Shrouded. Whereas the latter strategically squared off against us with military precision, the Ghosts instead fly at us with acrobatic grace, clambering over scaffolding and leapfrogging around the levels with dizzying speed. All their movements are dynamically generated, Willits whispers to us, encouraging us to return to the level again and test this out. Which we do—taking an alternate route and seeing firsthand how the Ghosts move differently through the level. Not a problem though, because we also have a crossbow with electrically charged bolts—perfect for zapping our foes in this waterlogged level.

While we wouldn't use the word "goofy" to describe *Rage,* it does feel less oppressive than previous id shooters. The third area in our world-exclusive playtest further showcased the game's lighthearted personality: Mutant Bash, an arena-like series of challenges mowing down diminutive mutants in carnival-themed rooms. As we competed for high scores, we noted how differently these rooms could be tackled using the arsenal at hand. *Rage* is still very much an FPS, but one that offers more options than, "Which gun should I use?"

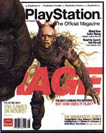


THE DEEP IMPACT OF ARMAGEDDON

In *Rage's* fiction, the asteroid Apophis does, in fact, hit Earth. Prior to the collision, the governments of the world united to initiate the Eden Project. Essentially, a series of modern-day arks, with about a dozen people per, they burrowed underground before impact. "The plan was to make the whole thing as redundant as possible," Willits says. "Instead of putting everyone in one big ark, they put smaller ones all over the surface, set to drill themselves out from underground at pre-determined times."

As with all good plans, this one goes awry; General Cross, the game's antagonist, had been put in charge to stay behind and help pick up the pieces after the asteroid hit. Instead, Cross took control of the program, and built a not-very-nice organization called The Authority. "When you emerge from your ark it's damaged, and you're the only one that survives," Willits says. "Settlers, mutants, bandits roam the wasteland. And The Authority is an omnipresent force."

Priority number one will be to stay alive; priority number two will be gaining the trust of the settlers. "You play a rather high-tech man from the past, in a world struggling to survive; in this way it pits the technology of the past and of the present against one another. We like to think of the main character as kind of Buck Rogers-esque." Without the spandex, naturally.

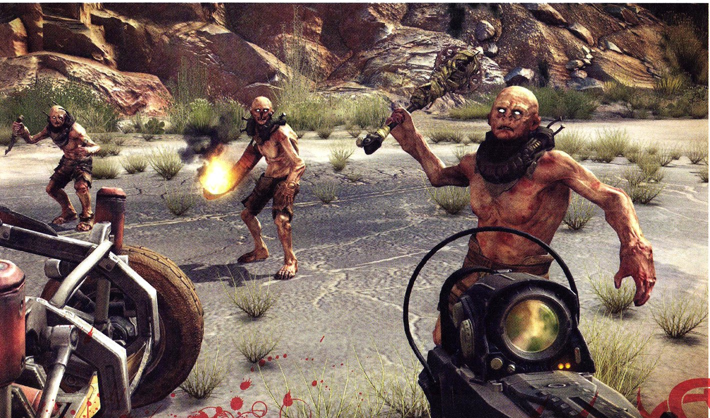


THE SCORCHER CLAN

WHO ARE THEY?
A bandit clan that worships the asteroid that destroyed their world. They believe that a demigod rode the burning rock straight into the soul of the planet, and by tapping into that energy they'll become the toughest mofos in the wasteland.

WHERE YOU'LL ENCOUNTER THEM
Roaming the wasteland like gypsies, burning everything in their path. They're easily spotted due to the bright images of fire and destruction that they use to decorate their bodies and vehicles.

FEAR THE REAVER
The Scorchers are led by Reaver, a nasty guy known for his brutality and open hatred of the Shrouded clan. He's the one in a bright yellow car with the big-ass comet painted on its side.



CARMACK RETRIBUTION

id Software's resident codemaster John Carmack talks technology and visual storytelling

PTOM: How does id Tech 5 bring *Rage* to life in a unique way?

Carmack: So there are a few things that you wind up with that everybody recognizes as issues with game development, and there are different techniques to address them. One is the sense of the perfect, straight out of the CAD program feel: that if you just build something and texture it, it has this sort of pristine feel to it, where everything is not necessarily realistic—a tile floor or ceiling going off into the distance, for example. It doesn't feel real; it feels like something out of a simulation. What we wanted to do was to let our artists go in and work [things] over in every way, to be able to add the sense of being lived in.

One of the *Doom* artists talks about telling a story in the environment. He was doing a street scene; this car broke its oil pan here, this stain is gone over here, and somebody parked over here, and the trash came out over here…that type of detail. [With our engine], once you have your layout, the physical form of the level, the artist can go in and they can stamp over all this stuff to add a level of detail and storytelling. And the great part is that it has absolutely zero impact on the game's performance or stability.

Historically, when you went in and you did beauty passes on the levels, it became a balancing act—you were on a razor's edge thinking, "Well, we can add more stuff to make it cooler, but it's gonna get slower."

Freeing people up with that was one of the real benefits. The traditional id Software game was something that just barely worked on the hardware available, and when people got the better systems later on, it would get the framerates up and get going.

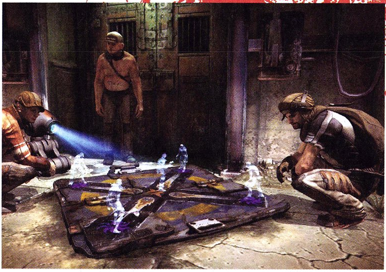
Why should PS3 owners be excited that the game is being built from the ground up by id?

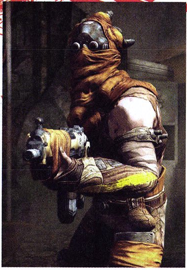
Well, I don't think that people should necessarily give a developer a free pass because of their history. I would want the game to be judged on its own merits. It is true that a large class of the games people play today is a descendent of what we did originally, but that's no reason to give us a free pass on something. I think that in this case we're pushing the technologies in a way that other people are doing, and taking all that we were good at before—the run-and-gun corridor shooters, which we did invent—but we're branching out into other areas. But I hope we can earn our reputation in the Sony space here with this title and our other upcoming titles.

There's something very inviting about *Rage*, something that really made us want to pick up the controller and experience its world. What is that?

We care a lot about low-level feedback loops. Some of that is the 60Hz experience. Going back 20 years on the gaming side of things, so much of it has been taking away the barriers to letting you immerse yourself into the world. And different people have always had different thresholds on that; some people could throw themselves into the flat-shaded polygon worlds. But suspending disbelief used to almost be a skill. Now, we can present things that people step right into and be in that world.

Look, our job is to entertain you. We are not making some prima donna piece of artwork—this is intended to be fun, and that colors the entire design process. We didn't want it to be off-putting and formidable, a "we will crush the player" kinda thing; we wanted it to just be something that's a blast to play.





PlayStation
RAGE

After our time with *Rage,* it becomes clear that the game won't revolutionize first-person shooters—but that's not its goal. Rather, it's yet another evolution of the genre, another example of id doing what id does best: iterating on its core technology, eking every ounce of power from the hardware it's running on, and making a game that's as eye-searingly pristine as humanly (or Carmack-ly) possible. It's a game driven by technology—and the technology is something fierce. Running at a velvety 60 frames per second with so much detail, *Rage* could be easily mistaken for a game running on a high-end PC tricked out with the latest graphics card—not a $300 PS3.

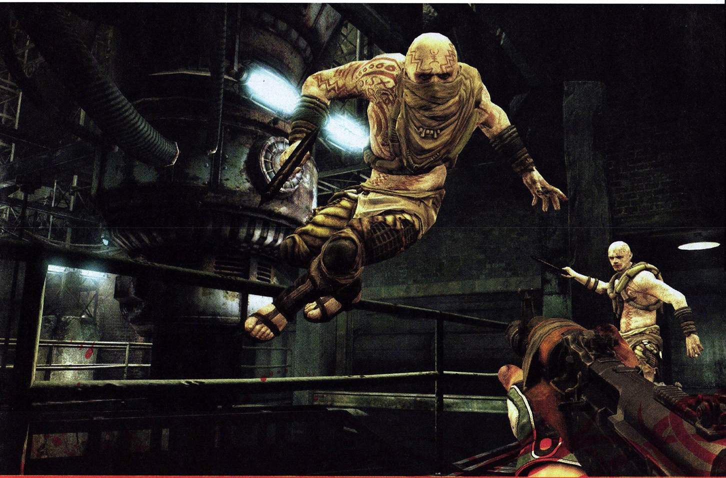
But *Rage* isn't just a technical showcase. This is a tight, focused shooter that—even at this early pre-alpha stage—seems to be tying together all of its disparate gameplay mechanics and narrative elements into something that feels organic and transportive for the player. The sheer visual and gameplay variety already on display is as impressive as it's fun. And though it's already a strikingly polished affair, the game is still a ways out; id's a company for which release dates have always simply been listed as "when it's ready." That said, we've been given a release year: 2011—barring nuclear disaster or an asteroid hitting Earth. ■

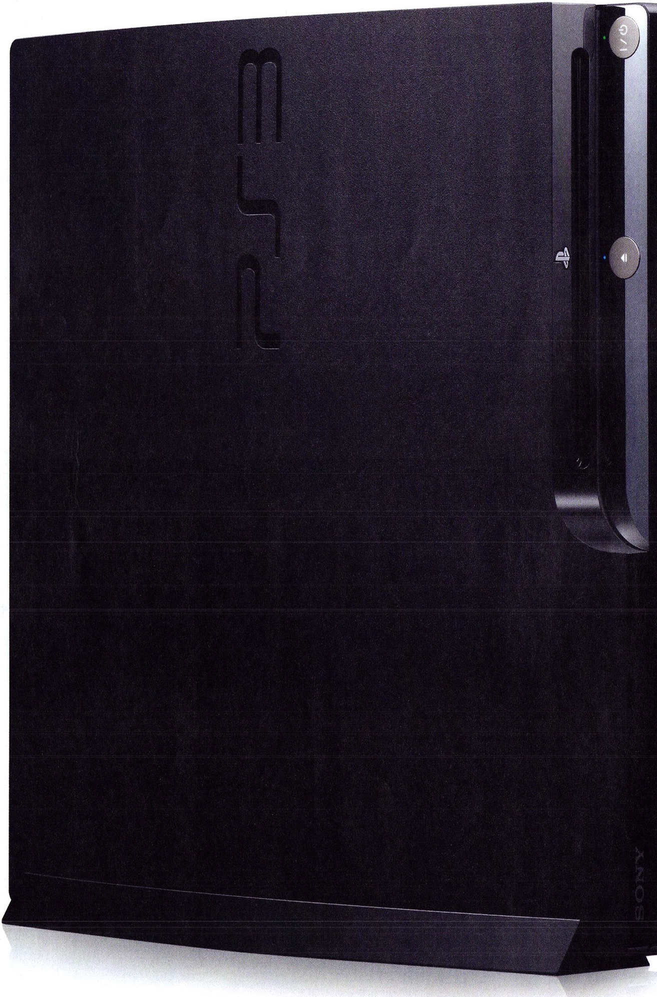
THE SHROUDED CLAN

WHO ARE THEY?
Made up of members disillusioned by their own clans, the Shrouded have come together under a veil of secrecy to disguise their true identity.

WHERE YOU'LL ENCOUNTER THEM
In their hideouts and settlements, which are protected by traps and secret passages.

DEADLY DEVICES
The Shrouded are capable of engineering and creating various items, including the RC Bomb Car, capable of long-range strikes on both vehicles and any person foolish enough to venture too close to their hideouts.




PS3
SONY

Members Only

Welcome.

Are you the type of person with an irrepressible lust for life, someone who grabs life by the balls and doesn't let go? Rugged and confident, yet no nonsense. You are nobody's fool. You are no clown. You're called a maverick because you are not afraid to shock. They've referred to you as the special one, a man of the world. You're the one by the pool with the classic drink and a calm demeanor. But you're also the guy with the killer instinct, the discerning wit, and the attention to detail. If this is you, then you're exactly who we're looking for. You're in good company, with exclusive access to the hottest PS3-only releases. You are among friends.

MotorStorm: Apocalypse

Twisted Metal

inFamous 2

SOCOM 4

LittleBigPlanet 2

Killzone 3

Gran Turismo 5

Twisted Metal

Available: 2011

David Jaffe lied to gamers and everyone loves him more for it. That says something.

What it says, for those who haven't been following the saga of *Twisted Metal,* is that just about anyone who's played these PlayStation classics has been ravenous for a PS3 sequel. It's PlayStation's longest-running franchise and beloved for a reason, having defined the car-combat genre. And after Jaffe proved he could do more than car combat when he directed the first *God of War,* we only got hungrier. But Jaffe, in his inimitable Jaffe way, insisted for 18 months that his new studio, Eat Sleep Play, wasn't working on a new *Twisted Metal*—only to close out Sony's E3 press conference with a surprise reveal of the game.

> "*Twisted Metal* might turn Jaffe's playful lie into the object of our affection."

So he lied. Big deal. We get what we want, and Jaffe had a grand time toying with us. Good for him, and good for us.

But now it's time for the truth to start trickling out, including details on *Twisted Metal's* enticing new multiplayer mode, Nuke. A twist on capture the flag, Nuke incorporates class-based play in a complex yet accessible mode. The goal: to destroy a giant faction statue floating freely through a level, tethered to balloons that keep it aloft (though Jaffe tells us that in some levels, these statues will remain stationary). It's *how* we explode our enemy totem that showcases the warped minds of Jaffe and his team. In a demo, we saw the Dolls square off against the Clowns, with Dollface and Sweet Tooth serving as faction leaders, each manning a turret placed in a carefully selected location. The first step: capture the faction leader and drag him or her across the level to our own faction's missile launcher. The next step: keep the faction leader within the launcher's perimeter long enough to charge it up, then feed the leader into a grinder to begin the launch sequence. The final step: steer the missile into the statue. Repeat the whole process two more times, and that's a wrap.

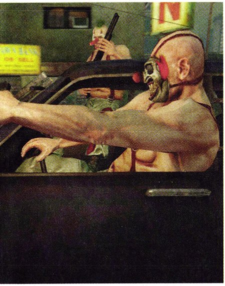
Easier said than done. Every faction has access to over a dozen cars, each with unique skills and attributes. As in past iterations, Jaffe likens his cars to characters in a fighting game, adding: "It used to be just armor and special weapons and handling that were the difference. Now it's everything from weapon-carrying capacity to how long you appear on the enemy's radar to how fast your turbo regenerates. All of that is different for every car."

Take Roadboat, a classic Cadillac-style car with magnets that can suck in foes and toss them away, or, as alt-fire, can ricochet its magnets around corners to avoid head-on damage. Or consider Vermin, an exterminator van with a rat atop its roof that can be steered like a guided missile. Or the tow truck, which spawns taxis that

5-Star Concierge

★★★★★

Gary: Yes, I'm a bit of a wuss when it comes to online gaming, but *Twisted Metal's* smart approach to car-based classes already has me giddy. I know I can handle these rides, and I'm looking forward to grand, goofy fun using Talon to grief my foes.



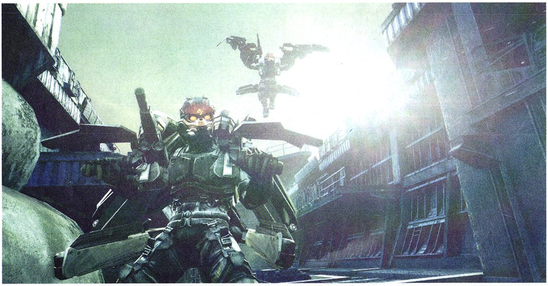
can be tossed ahead to clear out foes, or can drop health for friends. Or the ambulance, which can launch a steerable gurney. Or the motorcycle, a defensive weakling but offensive powerhouse, with a chainsaw that can be charged up by dragging it along the ground. There's even a helicopter, Talon, which marks the first time aerial gameplay is in the franchise.

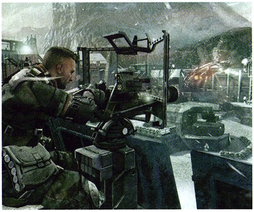
While the complexity is readily apparent, the simplicity of the controls remains true to the *Twisted Metal* franchise. Nuke was hands-off, but in our sampling of the standard deathmatch, we eased back into the driver's seat with no trouble at all.

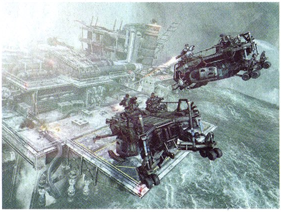
Single-player remains a mystery; Calypso is hosting a Twisted Metal contest, the winner of which will get whatever prize he desires. And much of multiplayer remains to be revealed as well. But with up to 16 unique vehicles and massive destructible environments, *Twisted Metal* might turn Jaffe's playful lie into the object of our affection when it releases sometime next year.

Killzone 3

Available: February 2011







With a host of high-profile heavyweight shooters set to spawn in the coming year, the mother of all genre deathmatches is brewing.

Our first hands-on mission time with the next *Killzone* had us entering the arctic-set combat zone astride an intruder dropship. We marveled at the flurrying snow and the spray from waves crashing upon the craggy ice-covered shoreline below as we razed and shredded Helghan air units, ground structures, and soldiers with the Intruder's mounted mingun. Incoming enemy fire eventually downed our transport but, after salvaging the minigun from the wreckage, we entered the fortified refinery-like installation and continued the fight on foot.

The brief but intense action we experienced and additional video footage from the game illustrated two major elements slated for the threequel: an increased emphasis on vehicle-based gameplay and larger, more varied environments. In addition to the familiar Intruder, jetpacks offer new tactical options for the infantry, while a bevy of new land-based vehicles promise additional play variety. Expect excursions through nuclear wastelands and jungles in addition to our excursion through Helghast's great white north.

For those on the cutting edge of gaming tech, *Killzone 3* will also support 3D and the PlayStation Move. We viewed some 3D battle sequences and while the extra dimension isn't a huge game changer, dodging rocket-propelled grenades while airborne in a jetpack gave us the sneaking suspicion we may soon be envying those fortunate enough to own stereoscopic 3D-capable HDTVs. And while we haven't yet experienced *Killzone's* Move-control interface (though we did snicker at an illustration of it in action), we may not be laughing the first time a newbie frags us with an unprecedented level of intuitive aiming ease and accuracy.

5-Star Concierge

★★★★★

Scott: Jetpacks—despite being one of the most obvious candidates for a kick-ass gameplay mechanic—have so rarely been done right. But if the team at Guerrilla has proven anything, it's that it can easily succeed where others have failed.

inFamous 2

Available: 2011

We liked *inFamous.* In fact, we liked it a lot. But did we *love* it?

Sure, it was a great game, set in a massive city with tons of buildings to clamber around and a dense population of urban denizens. And the story was among the strongest we enjoyed for a comic-style caper. But the powers? *Brzzzt. Bzrzzzt.* We couldn't help but feel underwhelmed by what should have been a lot more electrifying experience.

And that was the problem with *inFamous:* We weren't powerful enough—a fact the folks at developer Sucker Punch are well aware of. Indeed, they were the first to remind us that at its core, *inFamous* is an origin tale. And anyone who loves superhero comics knows that origin stories are best left for flashbacks or special issues (or in the case of games, side missions).

> "inFamous 2 is all about getting up close and pounding on guys."

The sequel, however, is a *battle* story. In *inFamous 2,* Cole MacGrath is back, fully powered up, and ready for action. The setting has moved to the bayou city of New Marais, a fictional take on New Orleans, and the conflict is much bigger this time. Cole has to not only contend with hatred and bigotry directed at mutants and superhumans, but also the dark entity know as the Beast, which seems intent on destroying, well, *everything.*

Our demo began at a Militia hate rally led by the elderly Bertrand, with Cole lurking in the crowd. But he's not the only superhuman there. Soon enough, a vicious mutant attacks the crowd, and Cole leaps into action.

What struck us immediately—even at this early stage (the game is scheduled for release sometime next year)—is how much we were drawn right into the action. If the first game was about ranged attacks, with melee coming into play only as a last resort, then *inFamous 2* is all about getting up close and pounding on guys. Yes, we could still blast away with our electricity—but we now have a weapon we carry on our back that helps channel our current in a much more direct and satisfying manner, letting us pummel our foes like a powered-up hero should. The melee is significantly more satisfying, and context-sensitive finishing moves helped reinforce the sensation of epic power at our disposal. Meanwhile, Cole's ranged attacks have also received upgrades: We can now, for example, send out a tornado that will demolish everything in its path, and our explosive grenade-like attacks took down huge chunks of buildings in an oh-so-satisfying display of destruction. Also satisfying: having a full range of movement right from the start, with more options to use the city's grid to slide, grind, and glide from rooftop to rooftop.

Cole, too, has received a physical upgrade, now sporting a full head of hair, lots of ink on his arms, and a snazzy new outfit, all of which make

5-Star Concierge

★★★★★

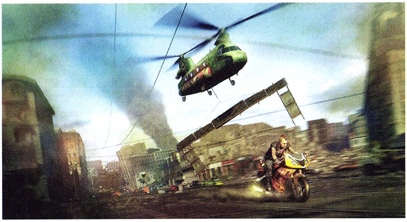
Gary: The original *inFamous* opened up after I got the ability to glide halfway into the game. Having that ability from the start, along with a new one that lets me grab a rail with an electric tether, makes it all the more joyful to explore this massive new city.

him look younger and more vital. Though we've heard some fans grumble about the change, we're thinking of it along the same lines as a redesign of a major superhero when a comic series changes creative teams. In the case of *inFamous,* though, Sucker Punch is still at the helm, but they tell us it's in their culture to "constantly push creative boundaries and solve problems in different ways." "We're trying to avoid just making more levels," game director Nate Fox says. Whatever the case, we already prefer the new-look Cole to the jacket-wearing baldie of the previous game.

There's much to still be revealed about *inFamous 2,* but Sucker Punch already seems to be building on the strengths of the first game while casting aside its weaknesses. As our demo ends, we see an enormous creature step out of the shadows, grabbing a bystander and dragging him into the darkness. It's a cinematic moment hinting at both the enormous enemies and epic scale Sucker Punch hopes to bring to *inFamous 2.*

MotorStorm: Apocalypse

Available: 2011



The average city-dweller might frown upon the idea of sticking around a crumbling, earthquake-ravaged metropolis, but not the daredevils of the *MotorStorm* franchise: They see it as an opportunity.

Such is the premise of *MotorStorm: Apocalypse,* the third PS3 entry in Sony's traditionally off-road racing series. The drivers here will have more than just aftershocks to contend with: They find themselves racing in the midst of a battle between a private military group and the "crazies," leading to rocket attacks and machine-gun fire around each track.

What results is a constantly changing race experience, in which buildings collapse, streets cave in, and bridges give way under the weight of 16 racers, each driving one of at least a dozen distinct vehicles. All of the dirt bikes, buggies, trucks, and other vehicles from the first two games return, along with new supercars, superbikes, muscle cars, and choppers.

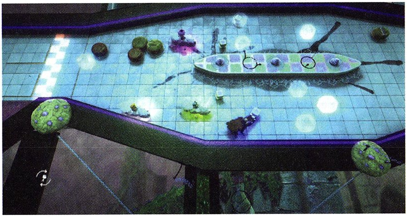
5-Star Concierge

★★★★★

Gary: Holy crap! I get to drive up the side of a fallen building while the paramilitary is firing at me? And I thought *Split/Second* had big set pieces. Also, I can't wait to take a high-end supercar and race through the debris against a giant, lumbering truck.

LittleBigPlanet 2

Available: November



Play. It's a happy world, after all. A horde of sackbots is following a Sackboy around. It's love, or at least the videogame equivalent of such; someone's designed the 'bots with cheery red hearts for eyes, and all the little guys are programmed to follow their Sackboy leader.

Create. This new *LittleBigPlanet* gives players the tools and then, like Willy Wonka, lets them have at the factory. Whereas the first game only let players create single levels, now it's wholly possible to create entire games, complete with cut-scenes, voice-over dialogue, short films, all manner of wacky conveyances, and artificial intelligence-fueled bit players.

Share. Go forth and pass on the awesomeness. With the creation of Media Molecule's littlebigplanet.me the game's fans have a site dedicated to sharing all their great works.

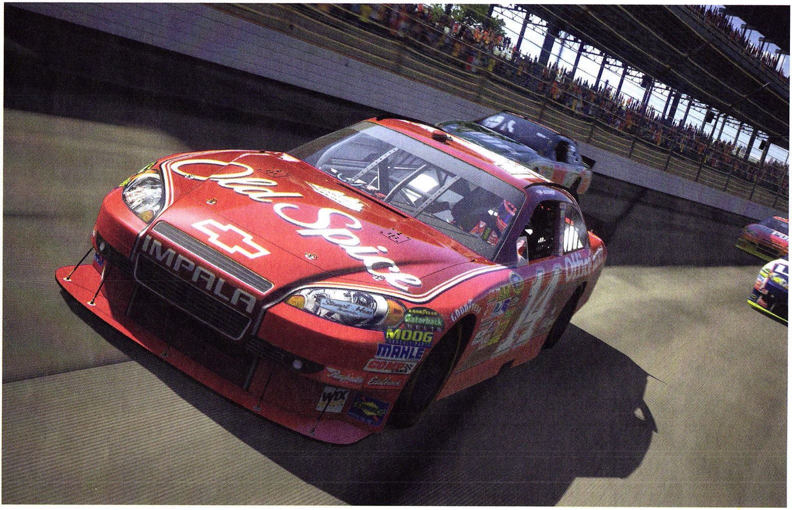
5-Star Concierge

★★★★★

Greg: Wait for it: *The Meathelmet Agenda,* a game featuring the enigmatic Professor Meathelmet and his, ah, agenda. Finally, I can bring my post-apocalyptic superhero vision to life, complete with deli meat headgear and professorships. Just wait, this one is going to be awesome.

Gran Turismo 5

Available: November



November 2, 2010, is Christmas for *Gran Turismo* fans. Yes, consider series creator Kazunori Yamauchi the gearhead's Santa Claus and developer Polyphony Digital the rest of his North Pole pit crew as there's *finally* a release date for the fifth installment in the standard-setting racing franchise. Yet despite some grumbling about the protracted development cycle—even among the *GT* faithful—our most recent look at *Gran Turismo 5* indicates the game will have been worth the wait.

> 'Gran Turismo's starting grid will number more than 1000 real-world production and racing-specific vehicles."

The heart of any *Gran Turismo* installment are the cars and *GT5's* starting grid will number more than 1000 real-world production and racing-specific vehicles. There are now two categories of automobiles—standard and premium—with standard cars numbering approximately 800 and composed mostly of upgraded-for-PS3 rides that have appeared in previous *Turismo* entries, while the remaining 200-plus autos will be full-featured premium models. Both standard and premium cars will display physics-based damage modeling that reflects scratches and dents acquired during the course of a race, but only premium vehicles will sport full recreations of interiors and major crash deformation traits like panel separation.

Yamauchi readily admits Polyphony might have gone overboard in its quest to accurately recreate cars, stating that the level of detail "might be more suited to the next generation of PlayStation." Side-by-side comparison photos of a real and modeled Audi R8 wheel assembly were practically indistinguishable with elements precisely and accurately modeled down to the wheel bolts, brake caliper, and the cross-drilled holes of the brake discs. Additional comparison shots of a BMW M3's rear diffuser and exhaust system and a Nissan GT-R's front intake and chin spoiler further illustrated the devs maniacal quest for exact replication. Even the bottoms of cars are accurately modeled as airborne rollovers are now incorporated in the game.

5-Star Concierge

★★★★★

Roger: The 24 Hours of Le Mans will be the true measure of the hardcore *Gran Turismo 5* driver. Recreate the race to real-world specs and I'll only be one full day and 3,100 miles away from racing immortality. But I'd better get a Trophy for it!

From *Gran Turismo 5's* 20-plus circuits (good for more than 70 track variations) we received glimpses of central Madrid, the wide-open expanses of Tuscany, landmark-packed Rome (bigger and reconfigured from its *GT3* appearance), UK car show *Top Gear's* test track, the Circuit de la Sarthe (Le Mans), and the driving enthusiast's Mecca that is the Nürburgring. Again, the level of detail exhibited was astounding with Yamauchi confiding that the urban tracks take upwards of two years to create. The off-track areas of the Nürburgring are even populated with barbequing campers during 24-hour races and the track's signature tarmac graffiti was updated on a yearly basis.

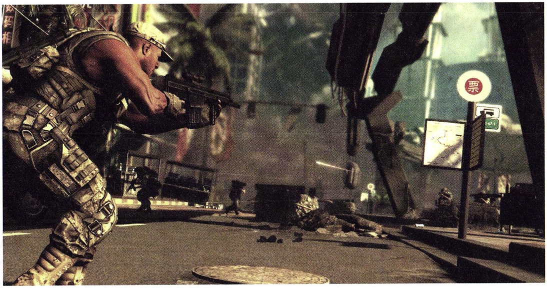
The *Gran Turismo* series has always

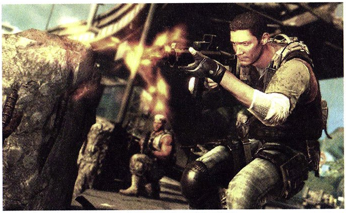
been a class-leader in eye candy and *Turismo 5* looks to up the ante again. Realistic day/night transitions, high and low headlight beams, smoke illumination, collision sparks, and debris spray may not seem revolutionary on their own, but when combined with the full HD 60fps graphics, they create a photographic level of realism. The effect and experience is further enhanced if the game is played in 3D mode via a 3D-capable HDTV. Attach a PS Eye to the 3D setup to access *GT5's* exclusive face-tracking feature that allows easy scanning of a car's interior and the player's field of vision with a simple turn of the head.

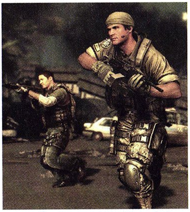
Online racing will be a major component of the *game's* experience. Public races will support voice and text chat for up to 16 racers and players can host private races with lobbies capable of holding up to 32 players. Community aspects allow players to track their own driving performance; keep tabs, communicate, and coordinate races with friends; and generally serves as an oasis for car enthusiasts to congregate.

SOCOM 4

Available: Fall







This feels like a new *SOCOM.* A dramatic score, explosive set pieces, story-driven missions—clearly the veteran team at Zipper Interactive has taken a more cinematic approach with *SOCOM 4,* its first crack at a PS3 installment for the series. Many of the franchise's hallmark features like squad-based gameplay and real-world military tactics remain an integral part of the overall formula, but the days of hyper-realistic action appear to be behind us.

Players take control of a NATO operations commander who's equipped not only with his trusty assault rifle but a pair of two-man fireteams as well. Our hands-on mission dropped us directly into an ambush that led us on a linear trek through a warn-torn cityscape filled with enemy soldiers, flaming vehicles, and frantically shouted dialogue.

After stumbling into a hail of gunfire, we quickly learned that cover plays an essential role. Though most objects in the game are fully destructible, the decimated city still provided plenty of cover. And unlike previous *SOCOM* games, *SOCOM 4* features a both a regenerating health bar and snap-to cover system. Considering that enemy combatants were intelligent enough to flank our position and lay down suppressing fire, these tools will likely dominate the new experience.

We also quickly discovered that simple commands could be issued to our fireteams to provide tactical support. This mainly consisted of pointing to a location and tapping the D-pad to say "Go!" but it added some welcome depth.

Of course, we spent most of the mission just maneuvering between pieces of cover and taking care of bad guys ourselves. The intense atmosphere and the fact that we finished the mission by calling in an airstrike made the whole experience feel accessible and exciting. Now we just need to learn more about the team-based multiplayer…

5-Star Concierge

★★★★★

Scott: Both Zipper and the *SOCOM* series have a distinguished history with PlayStation. *SOCOM 4* breaks from the franchise's traditional level of realism, but I trust Zipper and can't help but be excited to see how this zippier game turns out.

24 hours

1 MAN • 100 GAMES • A NIGHT OF UNBEARABLE FUN

They said it *couldn't* be done. They said it *shouldn't* be done. They told me I was alternately crazy and stupid for trying it and, guess what? *They were right.*

by Greg Orlando

"Take that Ming vase!"

Lunch O'Clock

Pizza chains serving grease-laden pies slathered with meat products are a god-send for today's inactive, never on the move editor.

MY TALE...

I sat in front of a TV and played PS3, PS2, PSone, and PSP games—100 to be exact—in 24 hours' time. That's one game every 14 minutes and 24 seconds.

And, yes, I even played *Dora the Explorer: Dora Saves the Snow Princess*. But anyone looking for a happy ending, I fear, will be sorely disappointed; the snow princess went unrescued and the penguins never got to the picnic.

A Fool's Errand

The following is a true story …

When British adventurer George Mallory was asked why in the world he'd want to scale Mount Everest (roughly 29,030 feet tall), he famously replied, "Because it's there." Mallory died on Everest and, in retrospect, "because it's there" seems a perfectly stupid reason to take on a challenge, especially one as life threatening as scaling the world's tallest mountain.

Looking back, I had no "because it's there" to rationalize what was, essentially, a hare-brained scheme. Playing videogames for a marathon session isn't conquering an unexplored bit of our world. It's certainly not brain surgery either. It's not even mopping the floors after a particularly gruesome brain surgery. It might be potentially fatal, but only for Koreans playing massively multiplayer online titles who forget to stuff a little food in their mouths now and again.

Imagine competing in a grueling marathon and, upon completion, receiving neither a medal, nor a ribbon, nor even a word of congratulations, but rather a dunce's cap to be worn in perpetuity. That's more or less playing games for 24 hours.

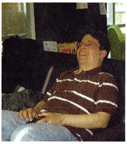
The Challenge

Monday, 8:00 a.m.

The PTOM offices are spacious enough to accommodate a demonstration area, a place where the magazine editors can play host to visiting game company representatives and their soon-to-be-released titles. There's a 52-inch Sony ↗

1. BRATZ: THE MOVIE

Collected blingz, adopted catz, got headachez. (THQ, PS2)



2. Monster Hunter Freedom Unite
The random game-name generation machine broke down here. (Capcom, PSP)

3. Omega Boost
Live-action, full-motion video cutscenes? Welcome back, 1995. (SCEA, PSone)

4. Beyond Good & Evil
Beyond awesome is more like it. (Ubisoft, PS2)

5. Amplitude
Amplitude begat *Guitar Hero*, and it was good. (SCEA, PS2)

6. Fantavision
A PS2 launch title that should, rightly, be launched into space. (SCEA, PS2)

7. Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
Killed terrorists and watermelons. Mission accomplished. (Activision, PS3)

8. SkyGunner
The laws of physics make it impossible for waifs with bigger eyes or spikier hair to exist. (Atlus, PS2)

10. PaRappa The Rapper 2
Proof positive a dog can rap better than Vanilla Ice. (SCEA, PS2)

11. Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.
Tom Clancy's bad spelling ensures sadness for us all. (Ubisoft, PS3)

12. Every Extend Extra
Trippy, like the time I had the boogie fever and hallucinated until the doctors bathed me in ice. (Buena Vista Games, PSP)

13. Manhunt
Rockstar's murder simulator is, to paraphrase Paul Simon, still terrible after all these years. (Rockstar, PS2)

14. Shinobi
Lone ninja kills tanks with a sword—I call that Tuesday. (Sega, PS2)

15. Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction
In the future, only the Toolbox of Indifference will supersede the Tools of Destruction. (SCEA, PS3)

16. Killzone Liberation
A touching story about the time I visited the waiting line at the Department of Motor Vehicles. (SCEA, PSP)

17. Heavenly Sword
I killed so many people killing's lost all meaning. I've become everything I hate. (SCEA, PS3)

18. God of War
This is the game that restored my faith in slaughter. Thank you, *God of War*. (SCEA, PS2)

19. Facebreaker
This is the rare game that's more fun when it's not put into a game console. (Electronic Arts, PS3)

20. Viewtiful Joe
Joe knows. Indeed. (Capcom, PS2)

21. Lumines
It's like *Tetris* only with 100 percent more possibly seizure-inducing flashing lights. (Ubisoft, PSP)

22. Jet Moto
It's a good thing that whole ads-in-games nonsense never took hold, huh? (SCEA, PSone)

23. MIRROR'S EDGE

Beyond the *Mirror's Edge* lies either madness or waffles, I am unsure. (Electronic Arts, PS3)

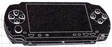
24. Silent Hill: Shattered Memories
This game wanted me to take a test. I tested the game by hucking it at the intern. (Konami, PS2)

25. Katamari Damacy
Here's how to ruin a fun game: Have a huge talking head regularly interrupt gameplay with inane chatter. (Namco, PS2)

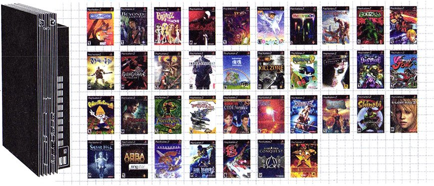
9. PSYCHONAUTS

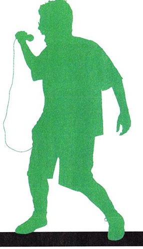
It's psychotherapy, only without the crying and $75 an hour fees. (Majesco, PS2)

The Breakdown



The Breakdown





→ TV, a couch the staff members inherited from the human resources department, and a faux-wood oblong table whose four legs are all cleverly designed to be of different lengths. There are windows on the right-hand side of the sofa and behind the TV, and the view is marvelous: to the right, the windows serve as a makeshift poster board on which copies of magazine pages we're currently working on are slathered; beyond the TV set, it's possible to stare at a series of rolling hills that give South San Francisco its (very limited) charm. It's here the challenge will be undertaken, and I will need to stay in our offices—with only limited breaks for urination and bowel movements—for an uninterrupted 24 hours. At minimum.

Intern David Murphy, who we've come to refer to as Daniel "David" Murphy or sometimes David "Daniel" Murphy (after the now-injured New York Mets infielder Daniel Murphy), spearheaded the effort to acquire 100 games. He's responsible for the huge piles of PSone, PS2, PS3, and PSP titles littering the demo area. He's begged. Borrowed. Cajoled. Stolen. When the goons come looking for their games, the PTOM staff members will stand in unison and point directly at Murphy. *That's the guy,* we'll say, selling out our intern like a quintet of modern-day Judases. Self-preservation is our only goal, but for now we are appreciative of his efforts.

The offices are deserted in the early morning hours. It's better this way, beginning the marathon in silence. Before starting, I load up on water, and make sure I've got a PSP and both a pen and notepad to ensure there's a record of my rapidly deteriorating thought processes.

At 8:30 a.m, it begins. Goodbye life, goodbye sanity. Hello crazy stunt and the black sofa with the oddly unsettling mystery stain that's now serving as my new best friend. ↗

38. THE CLUB

"I don't care to belong to a club that accepts people like me as members."

—Groucho Marx (Sega, PS3)

26. MotorStorm: Pacific Rift
I sought refuge from the *Storm,* but there was none to be had. (SCEA, PS3)

27. Me & My Katamari
Here's how to ruin a fun handheld game: Have a huge talking head regularly interrupt gameplay with inane chatter. (Namco, PSP)

28. Saints Row 2
Normally when I club a female prison guard with a cinder block twice, she stays down. (THQ, PS3)

29. Devil May Cry
I laughed *and* cried. It was a non-stop, action-packed rollercoaster of an adventure that grabbed me by the shirt and didn't let go (for 15 minutes). (Capcom, PS2)

30. Singstar: ABBA
Seriously, who ruined *ABBA:* Me or ABBA? (SCEA, PS2)

31. Primal
Rage distorts my memory, but after 30 games, I can truly say *Primal* was the 31st. (SCEA, PS2)

32. Resident Evil 5
Shooting zombies never gets old. (Capcom, PS3)

33. F.E.A.R. 2
Guns don't kill people. I kill people. With guns. (Warner Bros., PS3)

34. Metal Gear Ac!d
In all honesty, it was a long bathroom visit. (Konami, PSP)

35. Ico
Is it still a classic if it can only be played for 14 minutes? (SCEA, PS2)

36. NHL 2K10
What has bite, but no teeth? (2K Games, PS3)

37. The Mark of Kri
Or, as I like to call it, *The Enstabbening.* (SCEA, PS2)

39. State of Emergency
It's a riot. Simulator. (Rockstar, PS2)

40. WALL-E
Any game that makes me follow a cockroach is suspect in my book. (THQ, PS3)

41. Mega Man Legends
Was this the one where Mega Man gets a new hat? I forget. (Capcom, PSone)

42. Alpha Protocol
Or: The Spy who Clubbed Me. (Sega, PS3)

43. Tony Hawk Ride
Strange musings while board: If you cut Tony Hawk, does he not bleed $50 bills? (Activision, PS3)

44. Resistance: Fall of Man
E.T.'s not so tough when he's dead, now is he? (SCEA, PS3)

46. Dead or Alive Paradise
It was the breast of times, it was the worst of times. (Tecmo, PSP)

47. The Legend of Dragoon
Sadly, I forgot about this game *as I was playing it.* (SCEA, PSone)

48. Soul Reaver
As my mental facilities crumbled, I requested my co-workers refer to me as Sir Reavesalot. (Eidos, PS2)

49. Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core
The crisis was averted when I took this game to the bathroom. (Square Enix, PSP)

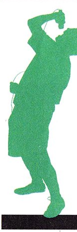
50. Fracture
In-game terrain deformation lets you create a big hole to dump this crapfest in. (LucasArts, PS3)

The Midnight Hour

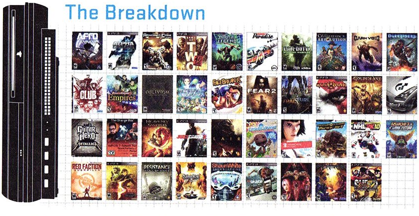
We joked about the intern's role here—it involved a bucket and him emptying said bucket. Right now, I want an intern. And a bucket.

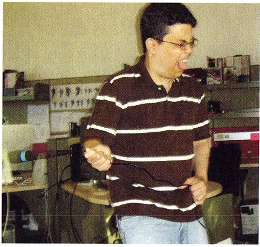
45. ODIN SPHERE

Spherical and yappy—just like my last girlfriend.
(Atlus, PS2)



The Breakdown





THE TRUE STORY cont.

→ Straight On Till Morning

(8:30 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.)

The first eight hours of the experiment pass almost without incident. With a consistent pace of 15 minutes per game, I'm on a clear path to the finish line and, of course, barking insanity.

My co-workers filter in roughly two hours into it. Today, they'll be doing real work like suckers while I sit on a couch until tomorrow—like an even bigger sucker.

With the Internet on computers now, I can order a stomach-destroying meal without having to get up from the couch or drop a controller. Somewhere in South San Francisco, the great circle of life plays out: Pizza is born that will meet a horrible death in my stomach. While I'm shoveling crappy food in my mouth, I lament *Katamari Damacy's* endless yappiness. "Who elected you king?" I scream at the King of All Cosmos—although with huge chunks of food still in my mouth it sort ↗

→ of sounds like, "Bloo wrected soooo splfingh?" This pizza will return to haunt me later.

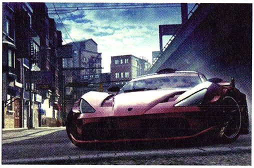
Wait Until The Midnight Hour...

(4:30 P.M. – 12:30 A.M.)

I motor along with the grim resignation of a prisoner on a death march. My delightfully comic quips, among them, "Take that, Ming vases!" and "Sucks to be you, Kaiser Wilhelm!" drop off. I have to pace myself, and go easy on the lungpower to conserve my dwindling energy.

Throughout, I've taken breaks to urinate, but now I have to go, and I fear (pardon my boorishness) that this may be at least a four-flusher. Luckily, Sony made PSP games for just such an emergency. With two stalls and a predominantly male office, relieving oneself is always, *ah,* an intriguing prospect, but I hit the jackpot: the spacious handicapped person's stall. And time flies...

My coworkers filter out at about 6:30 or so; the intern opts to ↗



51. Burnout Paradise
Enough already, open-world burnout is hardly paradise. (Electronic Arts, PS3)

52. Virtua Fighter 4
Fist, meet face. (Sega, PS2)

53. Red Faction Guerrilla
This was the third most fun I've ever had with a sledgehammer. (THQ, PS3)

54. Stretch Panic
If weird had a weirder cousin, it would be *Stretch Panic.* (Conspiracy, PS2)

55. Silent Hill 3
Silent Hill 3's theme park is far less less scary than Dollywood. (Konami, PS2)

56. Space Invaders Extreme
It's *Space Invaders,* only extreme enough to give me a splitting headache. (Square Enix, PSP)

57. The Orange Box
Five games on one disc? I had to stick with the classic *Half-Life 2.* (Electronic Arts, PS3)

58. Valkyria Chronicles
I fought the war and the war won. (Sega, PS3)

59. Resident Evil: Code Veronica X
She's an old girl, Veronica, but holds up nicely. (Capcom, PS2)

60. Killzone
"I am parking in the *Killzone,* baby!" I loudly exclaimed. I may have thought that was funny at the time, I don't know. (Sony, PS2)

61. Brütal Legend
It's the *This is Spinal Tap* of videogames. (Electronic Arts, PS3)

62. Super Street Fighter IV
It was a bit worrisome when I wanted William Howard Taft to fight Benito Mussolini. (Capcom, PS3)

63.

GOLDEN AXE: BEAST RIDER Once upon a time Sega took a great arcade game and made a bowel movement on it. And I was sad. (Sega, PS3)

64. Afro Samurai
Love of killing: Affirmed. (Namco Bandai, PS3)

65. GunGrave: Overdose
Any game where the hero kills with a coffin gets three of my thumbs straight up. (Sega, PS2)

66. Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil
Why does a platformer need such a wordy introduction? (Namco, PS2)

67. Dark Void
It's a void, all right. (Capcom, PS3)

68. God of War III
Heavenly. (Sony, PS3)

69. CODED ARMS: CONTAGION

I caught the fever for an excess of 10 minutes. (Konami, PSP)

70. Soulcalibur IV
I felt my soul smoulder. A little root beer put that right out. (Namco Bandai, PS3)

71. LittleBigPlanet
Floaty, floaty fun. (Sony, PS3)

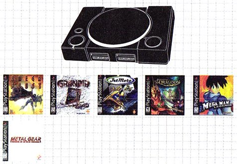
72. Rygar: The Legendary Adventure
Can a game be legendary and forgettable? (Tecmo, PS2)

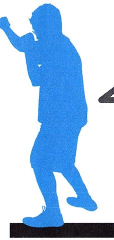
73. Gran Turismo 5 Prologue
Do I now question the validity of my driver's license? Yes. (Sony, PS3)

74. Guilty Gear X2
Weird + fighting = Good. At least for the sleep deprived. (Sammy Studios, PS2)

75. Dragon Ball Evolution
As I suspected, this was someone's idea of a prank. (Namco Bandai, PSP)

The Breakdown





"This is stupid. Even for me."

T-Minus Zero

The sense of accomplishment a person feels at having done something worthwhile is unparalleled. If only I had done something worthwhile.

→ stay a little longer. Meanwhile, I get the first hint of how creepy things are in a huge office when no one's around. Oh, and I realize that I have to step it up in the last eight hours or I may not finish 100 games in 24 hours. At this pace, I'll hit 96 titles by 8:30.

Final Countdown

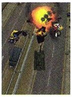
(12:30 A.M – 8:30 A.M.)

The office is tomb-like. Even with the office door locked, visions of my strangulation by DualShock cord at the hands of a disgruntled and psychotic janitor are not easily dispelled.

I am sleepy and uncomfortable. The couch with the mysterious stain on it now is like a pin-coated brick. My sanity is like some distant dream I can only vaguely remember when I start singing to myself, "There he goes, there goes Speed Racer and good riddance to the bastard." I vaguely suspect *Dragon Ball Evolution* is, in fact, not a real game; when I put the thing in the PSP, my suspicions are confirmed. ↗

76. GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

All I wanted was some egg drop soup. Really! (Rockstar, PSP)



77. Darksiders
John Cafferty and the Beaver Brown Band was nowhere in sight. (THQ, PS3)

78. Lair
Oh, man. How did I get dragon feces on my shoes? (Sony, PS3)

79. Rumble Roses
Every rose has its thorn. Just like every cowboy sings a sad, sad song. (Konami, PS2)

80. Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law
He's a superhero *and* an attorney—just like I am The Iron Sheik and 25th U.S. President William McKinley. (Capcom, PSP)

81. Chessmaster: The Art of Learning
Whoever gave me this game will pay. Oh, yes. Yes he will. (Ubisoft, PSP)

82. Lunar: Silver Star Harmony
By this late hour, all the role-playing games blended together into an endless final fantasy. (XSeed, PSP)

83. Star Trek: Conquest
Remember that good *Star Trek* game? This isn't it. (Bethesda Softworks, PS2)

84. Grandia
This was, well, grand-ia. (Sony, PSone)

85. Sid Meier's Civilization: Revolution
Thanks for destroying America, Ghandi! (2K Games, PS3)

86. Speed Racer The Videogame
Which begat *Speed Racer: The Feeling of Nausea.* (Warner Bros., PS2)

87. Metal Gear Solid
As ever, Solid. (Konami, PSone)

88. Godzilla Unleashed
The King of Monsters in the court jester of 3D Brawlers. (Atari, PS2)

89. Army of Two: The 40th Day
And on the 41st day, we saw Foghat in concert. (Electronic Arts, PS3)

90. Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection
Instead of sharing our feelings, we all just fought one another. (Namco Bandai, PSP)

91. Brooktown High
Finally, I get to relive the time I went to high school in my underwear. (Konami, PSP)

92. Wet
Which reminded me to visit the little boys' room. (Bethesda, PS3)

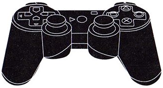
93. Indigo Prophecy
I had falsely predicted my own death long before popping this game in. (Atari, PS2)

94. Armored Core: For Answer
To be honest, I spent the entire 14 or so minutes trying to figure out this game's title. (Ubisoft, PS3)

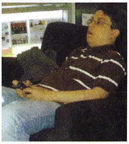
95. Shaun White Snowboarding
There's no business like snow business at 7:00 a.m. (Ubisoft, PS3)

Lessons Learned

As with an episode of the *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, it's impossible to play games for 24 hours straight and not be entertained while simultaneously learning a thing or two…or, say, five.



1. A person should do what he loves, but not for 24 hours straight.
2. Tacking "z" on to words to form plurals makes me want to punch a Bratz right in her hideously malformed face. I'll do it, too!
3. ABBA's song "Fernando" may well be the only pop song to make reference to the Mexican War (1848).
4. *Rumble Roses* runs at a smooth 48 panty shots per minute.
5. Remakes of arcade games usually end badly. For me.



96. ETERNAL SONATA

All I could hear was bed calling to me. (Namco Bandai, PS3)

97. Star Ocean: First Departure
It's like the Pacific. In space! (Square Enix, PSP)

98. R-Type Final
As I suspected, the "Final" was a trap. (Eidos, PS2)

99. Dynasty Warriors 6: Empires
Like *Dynasty Warriors* 1-5, but with a "6" at the end. (Koei, PS3)

100. Dora The Explorer: Dora Saves the Snow Princess To be honest, I may have just hallucinated this. (2K Play, PS2)

→ My playing time gets increasingly shorter, but I'm still able to get in a minimum of 10 minutes per game title. A friend, via instant messenger, confirms I am on track to finish on time. Also, he notes I may be dumber than my 84 (and rapidly plummeting) intelligence quotient would suggest. At this late hour, I am wholly unable to refute this.

The end is nigh. At 8:19, like a prisoner about to be paroled, I gleefully pop in the final game. "I will save you Snow Princess!" I proclaim. "The penguins will have their picnic!" But in my heart, I know it will not be so, and by 8:45 I am dead to the world, with my spine being cruelly readjusted by the 15 or so plastic CD jewel and game cases it's resting on.

But I did it. I defeated reason and sensibility. One-hundred games, one man, 24 hours. Now if I could only remember how to tie my shoelaces. ■

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Reviews

Scores | Analysis | Buying Advice

> “Here’s hoping Michael Bay is paying attention, because this is how it’s done.”

STAR SYSTEM

HOW IT WORKS

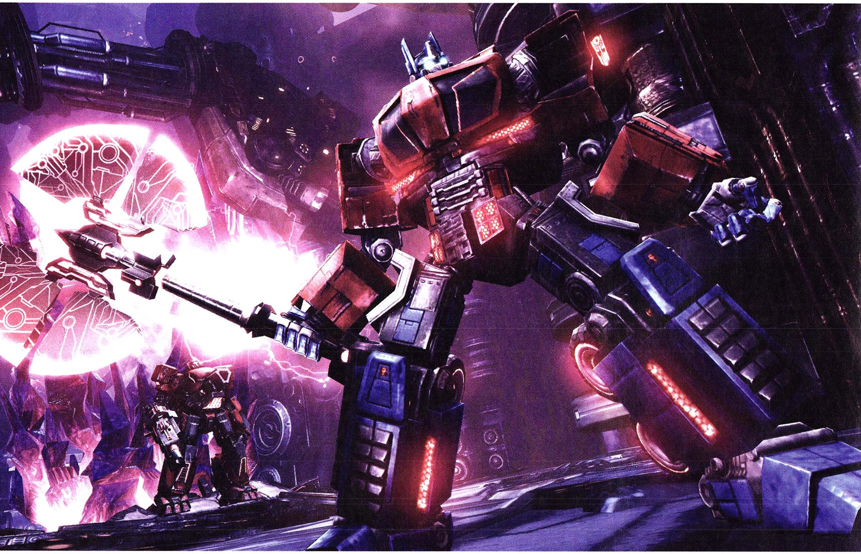
5 STARS: Legendary
A game so amazing, the entire *PTOM* staff recommends it. A must buy!

4 STARS: Great
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

3 STARS: Enjoyable
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there’s enough to keep you entertained.

2 STARS: Scarred
A smattering of entertainment hidden among an abundance of flaws.

1 STAR: A Flop
We played it so you don’t have to. Now you owe us cookies.



↑ The whole "robots in disguise" thing takes a sick day here.

TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON

The Matrix of Leadership has been passed

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** High Moon Studios

After two movies that were real pieces of Shi…a LaBeouf, and a couple of okay games based on those flicks, it's about time *Transformers* got back to basics. And that, thankfully, is what *Transformers: War for Cybertron* is all about: no humans, no bad jokes, no pandering T&A, just some hardcore robot-on-robot action. And by channeling (read: stealing) tricks and techniques from popular franchises, we've ended up with the best Tranny game yet.

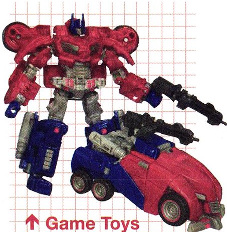
Sticking pretty close to the mythology, the story takes place a millennia before the original '80s cartoon, as the Autobots and Decepticons wage all-out war on their homeworld of Cybertron. The two-part story details how the wicked Megatron obtains his ultimate weapon, and Optimus Prime's rise to power as he leads his Autobot pals to glory. While we could pick either half of the campaign at the start, the functionally sound story makes a lot more sense with the Decepticons' tale as the lead.

Either way, automaton shootouts are the core of the game. There are occasional driving/flying segments to shake things up, but most of the gameplay focuses on entering a room, blasting everyone inside, exiting that room, then entering the next digital abattoir. We'll admit after killing our hundredth Decepticon clone it gets a tad old, but the enemy types are varied just enough to keep us plugging ahead. Plus a few of the boss fights are really good, using the fiction to their advantage—such as when mammoth robots like Omega Supreme come into play.

Gears at War

Even if *Cybertron* gets a little repetitive, the shooting is so sound that we never got bored. The game takes cues from the reliable and more deliberate pace of third-person shooters such as *Resident Evil 5* and *SOCOM*—and while blasting a zombie may be more satisfying than unleashing an explosive headshot on a robot, the shootouts could rarely be considered dull.

Cybertron has a class-based system that carries over from the previous franchise entry, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen,* which was in turn cribbed from *Team Fortress 2.* Each character in the game plays



↑ Game Toys based on a Cartoon based on Toys

After getting acquainted with the snazzy new game designs for the 'bots, we were happy to see that there are toys based on the game too. Once we got our hands on the Optimus (pictured), we felt like kids again, until we tried to transform the thing, at which point we felt like really stupid kids. Perhaps kids today are way smarter than us, or perhaps they don't make toys the way they used to dagnabbit, but changing the hunk of plastic into a space car was so confusing that we gave up out of fear that we'd break it. Still, untransformed it looks pretty cool on our desk—but you've been warned, ancient fanboys.

> “*Transformers* will, at the very least, be a fun summer distraction for fragheads waiting for their next call to *Duty*.”

somewhat differently (faster, slower, stronger, sneakier), and with the game's focus on multiplayer and cooperative play, it's certainly needed. Each campaign stage can support three-player co-op, and the surprisingly lengthy stages are made all the better when played with a couple of friends.

After the longer-than-expected campaign is wrapped up, there's still a very hefty chunk of multiplayer to keep us coming back. The standard deathmatch and other online staples are included, with *Call of Duty* being the next game *Cybertron* borrows from. In this case, the inspiration comes in the form of a leveling system and class loadouts, making it a pretty rich experience—but we're not convinced it's deep enough to maintain a loyal following. Still, *Cybertron* will, at the very least, be a fun summer distraction for fragheads waiting for their next call to *Duty.*

We had the most fun with escalation, *Cybertron's* version of *COD: World at War's* Nazi zombies. It's a co-op blast, and it's deepened by an added economy: Each kill earns credits to buy more guns, health, or ammo. We're suckers for these short, sweet bursts of teamwork, but wish there were more maps.

Roll Out!

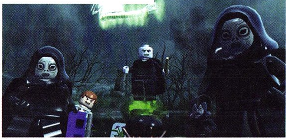
Cybertron's sci-fi setting really comes to life, with an overall techy vibe not just to the 'formers but their homeworld as well—which transforms nearly as often as they do. And the tone strikes a great balance of respect for the subject: It's stuffed with references for die-hard fans like us, but the story is clear enough for those who just want to plow through it and don't care to catch the many winks to the cartoons.

With a pretty lean summer of releases, *Cybertron* is among the best we're going to see for a while. And outside of some repetitive battles and a few painful difficulty spikes, it's a great action game that steals all the right moves from better games. Here's hoping Michael Bay is paying attention, because this is how it's done. | Henry Gilbert

Rating ★★★★☆

↗ This automobot wants something to shoot. We recommend prop comic Megan Fox.

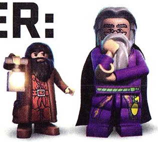
↘ Harry Potter and LEGO: A match made in marketing heaven using nubbed bricks that magically come to life and scurry under the couch to be lost.



↘ How come the bad guys always get to wear the cool outfits?

LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1–4

Still working the LEGO magic



PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+ **PUBLISHER:** Warner Bros. Interactive Ent. **DEVELOPER:** Traveller's Tales

Familiarity breeds contempt. It's an age-old maxim we all know and hate, but one that's more accurate than not. Which is why after satisfying LEGO romps through the *Star Wars, Indiana Jones,* and *Batman* universes, we couldn't help but regard a *LEGO Harry Potter* game with some suspicion. After all, how many times can developer Traveller's Tales build a game using the same bricks?

All the franchise's hallmark pieces are here: the genuinely charming and entertaining LEGO-ized translation of a popular media property; imaginative, inventive platform adventure gameplay; generation-gap–bridging co-op (there's no better gaming series for parent/child bonding); replay value galore; and a depth and attention to detail once exclusive to the best Japanese platform games.

Still, as good as the *LEGO* series may be, it's easy for ticklish creativity to become tired convention—a fate *LEGO Harry Potter* deftly avoids with a wave of its wand. The game's spellcasting and potion-mixing mechanics cleverly repackage some of the special abilities that were handled by alternate bat-suits in *LEGO Batman,* but cycling through the powers in *Harry Potter* felt like we were actually concocting magical stratagems on the fly.

But it's the wonderfully imagined Harry Potter world that stands out as the game's highpoint. Hogwarts, Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade, and other familiar locales are all wonderfully realized and presented less like levels than secret-filled areas ripe for exploration and play. Fans of the books and films will genuinely delight in reliving key moments from the canon.

Niggles are few but include: the tension-defusing wedging of potion-creation into boss battles (the Basilisk, for instance, seemingly takes a smoke break while Harry scrounges for ingredients); the lack of mid-mission save ability (losing all progress, say, 45 minutes into an hour-plus episode seems archaic); and we can appreciate mood and atmosphere, but some areas were just too dark even with the in-game brightness settings maxed out.

LEGO Harry Potter doesn't reinvent the gameplay brick, but it does manage to rearrange its signature parts to create a fresh, imaginative experience for LEGO and Harry Potter fans alike. | Roger Burchill

Rating ★★★★☆

↙ Attending Hogwarts is a privilege, but the tuition is outrageous.

→ It Must Be Said

Dobby is the Jar Jar Binks of the Harry Potter universe. Some may view the sniveling, annoying house-elf as a sympathetic and endearing character but, trust us on this, he leads to the dark side… Only the absence of spoken dialogue in *LEGO Harry Potter* kept us from joining the Death Eaters.

↘ Fun Fact: DeathSpank's newspaper is largely ceremonial.

↓ The game's hack-and-slash fighting is fun—as long as DeathSpank never gets hit.

DEATHSPANK

Like Conan, only stupider

PSN **PRICE:** $15 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** Hothead Games

His name is DeathSpank. He can swing one mean poop hammer. He's a hero unafraid to adopt a filthy orphan before stuffing said waif into his filthy orphan bag.

The downloadable adventure *DeathSpank* drives its titular hero straight through Questville. It blends goofiness with action-based role-playing, dropping DeathSpank into a world where an artifact called "the artifact" holds sway, and the results are simply charming.

DeathSpank is lantern-jawed and brainless, a sort of Dolph Lundgren, if the actor were given an infusion of personality or charisma. It helps, too, that the developers understand how the sort of stupid humor lubricating *DeathSpank,* as well as the genre serving as its foundation, works. Wholly self-aware of the conventions, *DeathSpank* allows its hero to unselfconsciously muse, "I run into a lot of contrived situations like this!" Absolutely undaunted by the prospect of poking fun at itself, it also allows DeathSpank to quote at length from the Bonnie Tyler opus *I Need a Hero.*

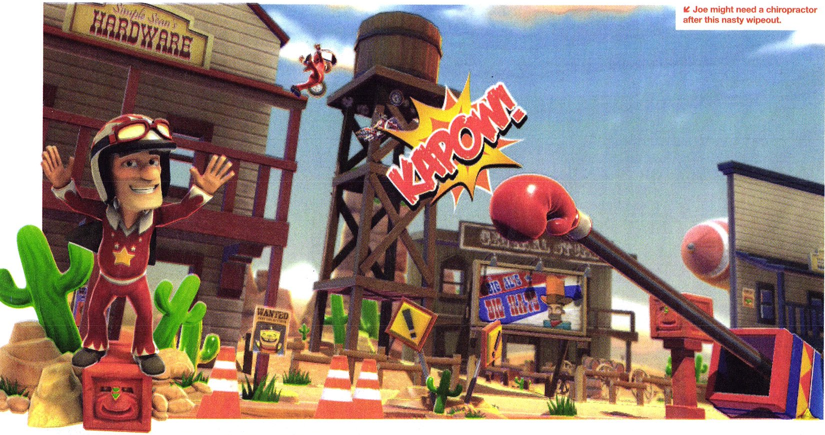
As a role-playing game, *DeathSpank's* range is limited, with the story padded out by what the protagonist refers to as: "Unimportant stuff I need to do." There's endless fetching, even if it's candy-coated in the game's endearing quirkiness (chasing down orphans, no matter how it's presented, still counts as a fetch quest). Puzzles present horns requiring dyeing and wooden boxes that can't be opened; they're smart and demand thought, but the developers counted on an audience not as versed in the lore or perhaps outright dumb. Special "fortune cookies" can provide spoon-fed solutions to players.

Hack-and-slash antics fuel the fire, but the game's health system makes extended fights an exercise in frustration. The game allows for a limited health potion stockpile, and consuming food is useless in combat as any beneficial effects stop once the hero takes a hit. It's certainly the game's Achilles' heel and it's unfortunate that with *DeathSpank,* the heel stops at about mid-thigh. | Greg Orlando

Rating ★★★☆☆

↘ DeathSpank kills because he loves. To kill.

↗ DeathSpank's love—it burns, burns, burns.



Joe might need a chiropractor after this nasty wipeout.

JOE DANGER

Let's get dangerous

PSN PRICE: $14.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Hello Games DEVELOPER: Hello Games

Hopping onto a stunt motorbike for the first time and pulling off a mid-air 720-degree front spin in "Superman" position while clearing a pile of demolished school buses is an exhilarating experience. But such high-speed acrobatic craziness is just one of the many joys found in the downloadable *Joe Danger.*

Helping the game's daredevil protagonist recover from a freak stunt accident and pull his career out of the gutter makes for a super fun mix of racing and platforming action. Navigating the side-scrolling 3D courses at high speeds is hardly a linear race to the finish line as tracks are brimming with spiked traps, immense scaffolding, spring-loaded triggers that launch Joe high into the air, lane-changing switches with alternate routes, flight-inducing ramps, and numerous other creative obstacles to play around with. There are also loads of opportunities to pull off sick stunt trick combos, which is one of the game's most entertaining pursuits thanks to some well-implemented physics and stellar level designs.

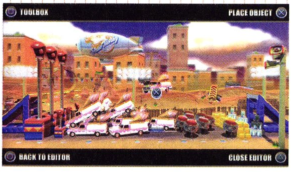
It's *Danger's* abundant gameplay that makes it so hard to put the controller down. In addition to a medal system that encourages high trick scores, every stage has multiple bonus objectives that can be tackled at any time and in any order. These pursuits can range from exploring the track to find hidden secrets to leaping off ramps to land within special target zones to collecting coins or letters and running non-stop trick combos straight to the finish line. Completing these tricky tasks yields stars needed to unlock new courses, so there's a ton of incentive to return to previous stages.

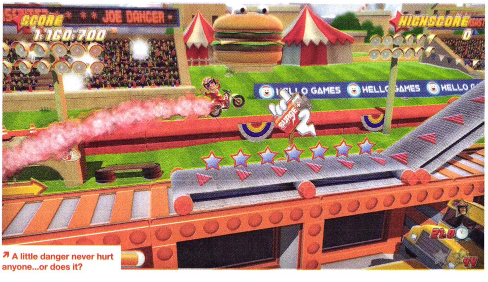
With an incredibly polished presentation bursting with bright colors and warm personality, *Danger* is as great to look at is it is to play. The absorbing solo campaign kept us occupied for many hours, and local splitscreen multiplayer matches extended the fun substantially. Indie studio Hello Games' debut release hooked us from the get-go, and with good reason: It's one of the best original games to hit PSN. | Nathan Meunier

Rating ★★★★½

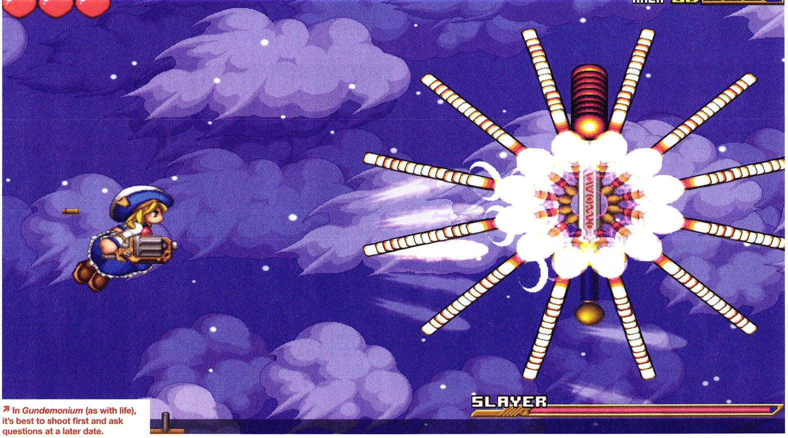
Dangerous Creativity

The deep sandbox editor mode makes it possible to create sprawling custom tracks from scratch, and the clever interface lets us un-pause the action to ride around in the level to test things as we're building. Custom tracks can be shared with pals and downloaded for even more dangerous bliss.





A little danger never hurt anyone...or does it?



↗ In *Gundemonium* (as with life), it's best to shoot first and ask questions at a later date.

GUNDEMONIUM COLLECTION

Bullet hell never looked so cute

PSN PRICE: **$14.99 (or $5.99 individually)** ESRB: **Everyone 10+** PUBLISHER: **Sony Online Ent.** DEVELOPER: **Rockin' Android**

Don't be fooled by the sugary-sweet art style and cute characters featured on this page. The three games included in the downloadable *Gundemonium Collection* are hard. Damn hard.

That's good news for shoot-'em-up fans, who should make sure they don't overlook this PSN gem. The trilogy comes packed with the insanely frenetic *Gundemonium Recollection, GundeadliGne,* and *Hitogata Happa*—all of which can be purchased separately. All three titles are gorgeous, with hand-drawn sprites and backgrounds, giving them a classic arcade-like look that's just too rare these days.

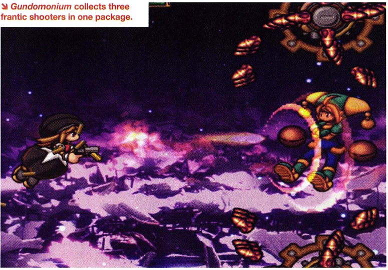
These games are the very definition of the term "bullet hell," a shooting game subgenre that, in this case, is stuffed with legions of flying French maids with rocket launchers who pepper the screen with projectiles. There are no hand-holding tutorials or easy wins—these games are brutally difficult—but once we got the hang of things, we began to needle our way through thick clouds of bullets with the pixel-perfect precision of a surgeon.

Recollection and *GundeadliGne* are both set in the same universe and charge us with crushing incoming waves of odd enemies, like samurai pirates and cowboys piloting Persian rugs. Our character has a single "fatal point" near her heart; it's the only area where we take damage when hit. Because of this, we could actually let bullets graze over our body in order to survive the steady swarm of enemy attacks. Doing so rewarded us with points through the game's friction system, which encouraged us to save our special attacks and bombs until we really needed them.

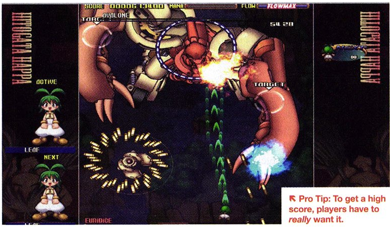
Happa rounds out the trilogy and is, by far, the hardest of the three games. The title can be roughly translated as "humanoid explosion," which makes sense considering the game's most devastating attack is, in fact, just that. Damaging enemies builds up a flow meter that, once maxed out, lets us sacrifice our character's life by smashing into enemies for extra damage. The disposable nature of this attack usually led us to stockpile our lives so we could efficiently destroy each level's boss by weaving our way past his attacks and finishing with a series of kamikaze strikes.

Collection is an old-school kick in the pants that floored—and simultaneously flooded—us with nostalgic memories of the days when clearing a level without continuing really meant something. | Tyler Nagata

Rating ★★★★☆



↘ *Gundomonium* collects three frantic shooters in one package.



↖ Pro Tip: To get a high score, players have to *really* want it.

↘ Far be it for us to judge, but we've got the word "rhinoplasty" on the tip of our tongue.

PERSONA 3 PORTABLE

School's back in session

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Atlus USA DEVELOPER: Atlus

If *Persona 3 Portable* were just a portable *Persona 3,* it wouldn't be anything special. Luckily, it's more akin to *Persona 3: The Vastly Improved and Full of Extra Stuff Edition That Also Just Happens to Fit in Your Pocket*.

In 2007, *Persona 3* rebuilt the series from the ground up, mashing the gameplay of a dungeon-crawl role-playing game into a sort of social-life simulation (starring a Japanese teenager trapped in urban fantasy weirdness). Then *Persona 4* came along to perfect this new model. It made a lot of useful changes based on fan feedback, such as giving players more control of their parties in combat (in *Persona 3,* we could only give commands to the main player character). *Portable* rolls all these fixes back into the last game, so now we can enjoy the old story with tuned-up gameplay.

There's more to that story than there used to be, too. *Portable* offers two choices there: Play with the original main character, whose quest hasn't changed much, or try a new female lead instead, which rewrites the story considerably. In her quest, around half the social links—the character-driven subplots where we get to know our party members and other people around the game world—were written exclusively for *Portable.* It's not quite a completely new adventure, but it's nothing like playing the same old game all over again, either.

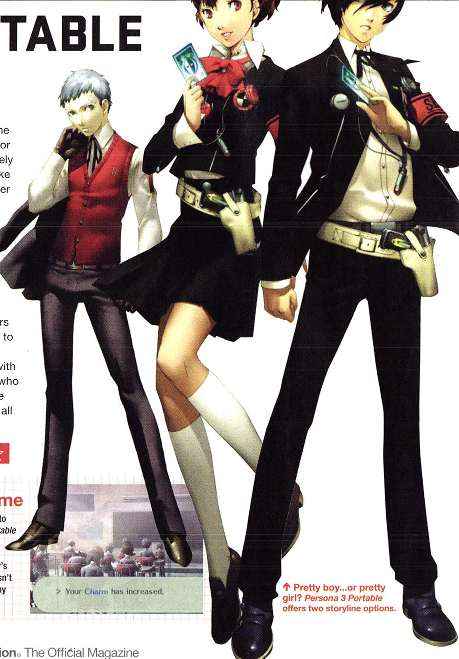
Persona 3 Portable was a great idea. The two halves of the game genuinely work together and feed back into each other; exploring the story in itself is fun (thanks to strong English dialogue), but the game also offers tangible rewards making it easier to hack through its dungeons.

Atlus didn't rest on its laurels with this revival. Even for those of us who played the original PS2 game, the *Portable* version is worth playing all over again. | David F. Smith

Rating ★★★★½

↘ In Our Spare Time

Persona 3 needed a few more activities to build up the hero's social stats, and *Portable* adds a boatload: part-time jobs, new hangout spots, an Atlus arcade, even goofy surveillance videos from the party's secret headquarters. That last item doesn't have a practical reward, but they're funny enough to be worthwhile anyway.


> Your Charm has increased.

↑ Pretty boy...or pretty girl? *Persona 3 Portable* offers two storyline options.

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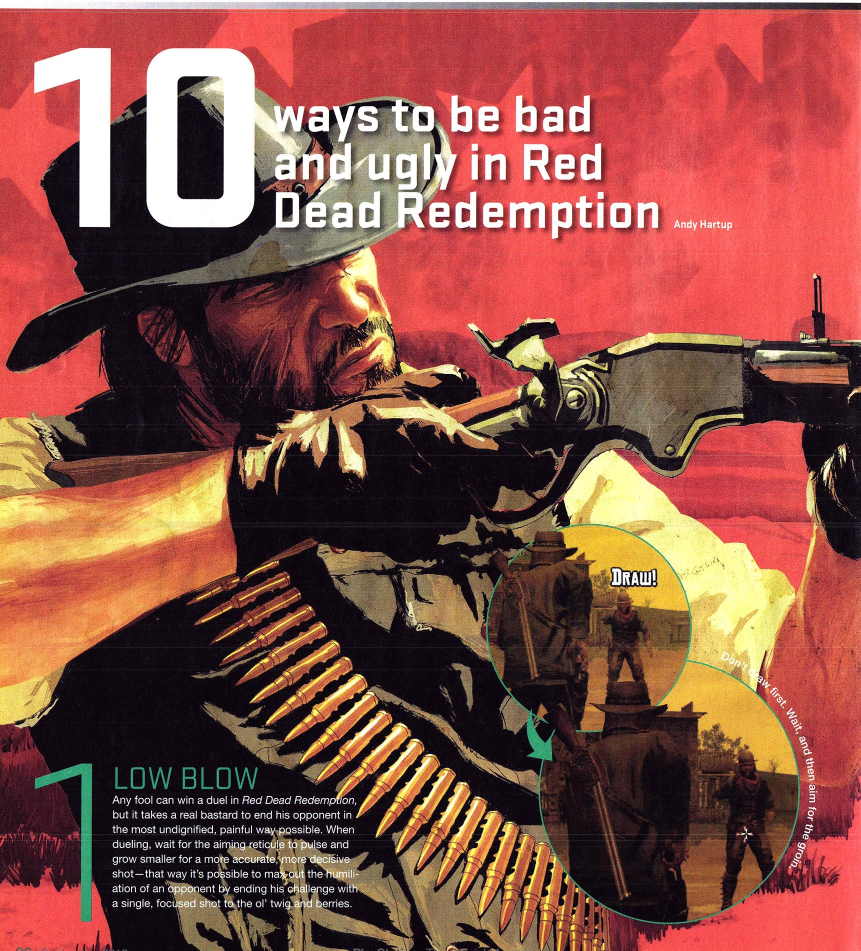
10 ways to be bad and ugly in Red Dead Redemption

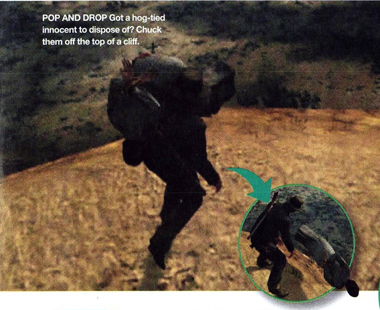
Andy Hartup



Don't draw first. Wait, and then aim for the groin.

1 LOW BLOW

Any fool can win a duel in *Red Dead Redemption,* but it takes a real bastard to end his opponent in the most undignified, painful way possible. When dueling, wait for the aiming reticule to pulse and grow smaller for a more accurate, more decisive shot—that way it's possible to max out the humiliation of an opponent by ending his challenge with a single, focused shot to the ol' twig and berries.



POP AND DROP Got a hog-tied innocent to dispose of? Chuck them off the top of a cliff.

2

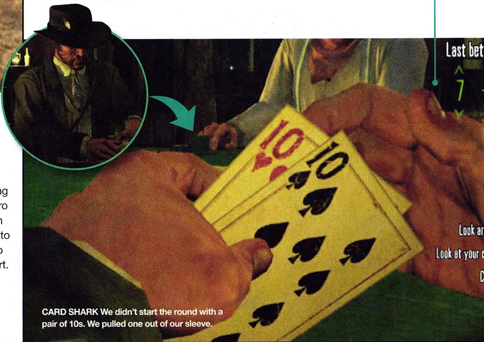
ROPE A DOPE

Any idiot can walk into a town like Armadillo and shoot the place up. It takes a more seasoned hand at bastardry to waltz in and start lassoing the local population before riding off with them on a horse. Chances are the hero will be chased by a posse if he makes off with too many ladies, so players'll need to be wily to keep the law at bay. Wouldn't want a victim to be killed before he's, er, left to die in the desert.

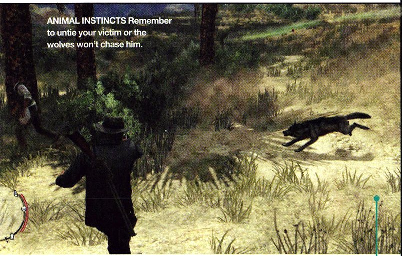
3

PLAY TEXAS SHOOT 'EM

Wear the elegant suit and players can cheat at poker. This means hiding a card up the hero's sleeve. It's easy to avoid being rumbled by nailing a simple minigame, but the real *Red Dead* bastard wants to get caught—preferably after losing plenty of money. A hero accused of cheating can fight a duel with his accuser and punish him for having the audacity to question his (dis)honor.



CARD SHARK We didn't start the round with a pair of 10s. We pulled one out of our sleeve.



ANIMAL INSTINCTS Remember to untie your victim or the wolves won't chase him.

4

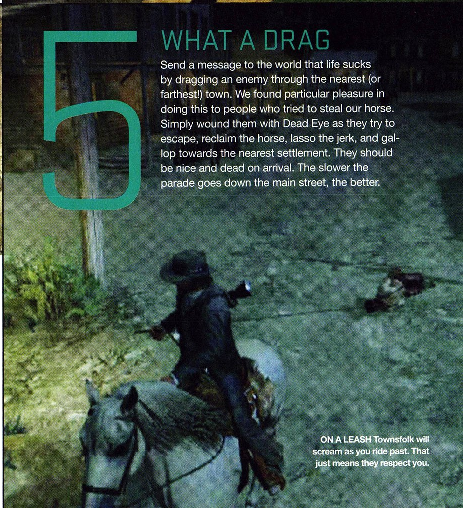
DO FEED THE ANIMALS

After roping a random passer-by and looking for something fun to do with your new-found friend, why not take them hunting? Head up to Tall Trees or Perdito with a reluctant comrade and carry him into the woods. Now, set him down on the ground and wait for the wolves or a bear to come along. And while the wildlife is feasting on this human lunch, players can make an easy, safe kill before removing the creature's pelt for a tidy profit. It's easy money.

5

WHAT A DRAG

Send a message to the world that life sucks by dragging an enemy through the nearest (or farthest!) town. We found particular pleasure in doing this to people who tried to steal our horse. Simply wound them with Dead Eye as they try to escape, reclaim the horse, lasso the jerk, and gallop towards the nearest settlement. They should be nice and dead on arrival. The slower the parade goes down the main street, the better.

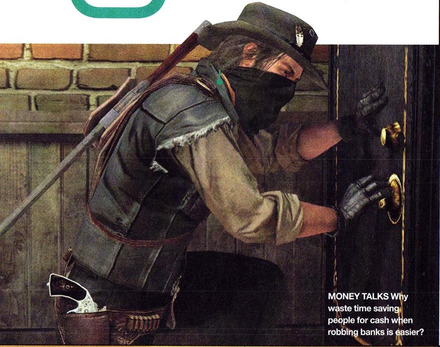


ON A LEASH Townsfolk will scream as you ride past. That just means they respect you.

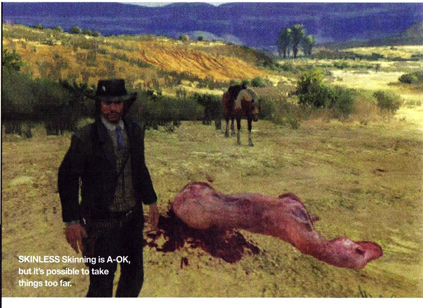
6

ROB THE BANK

Sometimes, old-fashioned villainy is the best. Grab a bandana from the tailor at Thieves Landing and equip it for that "mysterious stranger" look. Players will now be able to keep the heat off for longer when they march into a bank and demand the contents of its safe. It works well for holding up trains and harassing Blackwater's uppity citizens too.



MONEY TALKS Why waste time saving people for cash when robbing banks is easier?



SKINLESS Skinning is A-OK, but it's possible to take things too far.

7

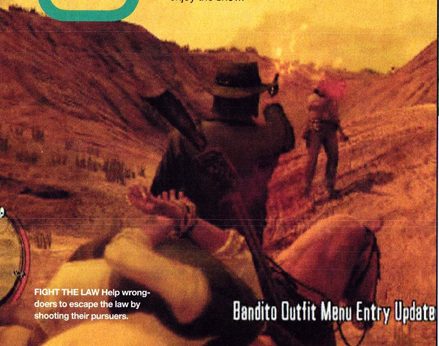
SKIN EVERY ANIMAL

Nothing says borderline-psycho like a man who shoots and skins every animal he sees. Dogs, chickens, horses, buffalo, rabbits, armadillo—start carving, preferably mid-mission. If a player is feeling particularly nasty, he can shoot his horse, whistle for another, and when it arrives, begin the skinning. Justify the madness by telling a significant other this is just for a Trophy.

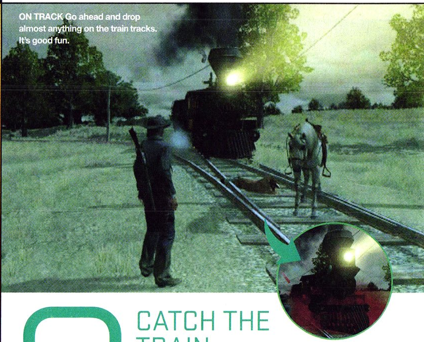
8

I SHOT THE SHERIFF

Ensure the West stays wild by helping out the criminals. Come across a broken prison transport? Stick a bullet in the guard's head. See two deputies chasing a bandit? Dead Eye will see both off, allowing the criminal to flee. Oh, and if a husband is being hanged by bandits, sit back and enjoy the show.



FIGHT THE LAW Help wrong-doers to escape the law by shooting their pursuers.



ON TRACK Go ahead and drop almost anything on the train tracks. It's good fun.

9

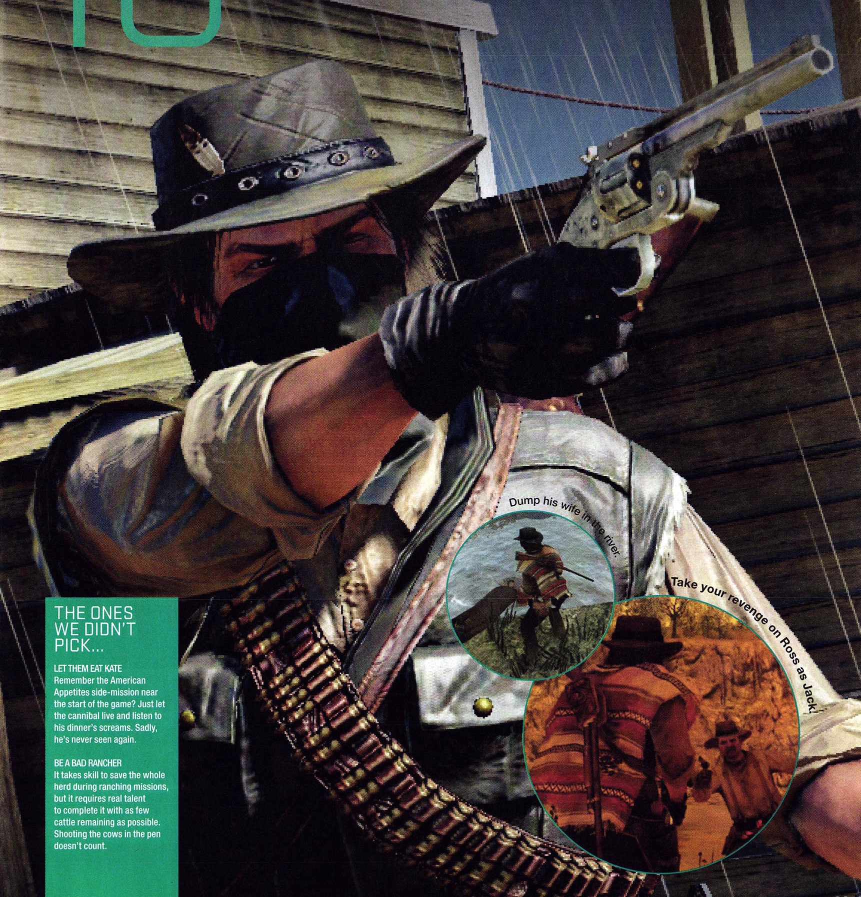
CATCH THE TRAIN

There's a Trophy for hogtying a woman, placing her on the train tracks, and watching as she's obliterated by a passing locomotive, but why stop there? Trains can take a long time to arrive at a specific spot—long enough to capture multiple innocents and line them up like fleshy dominos. Our record is three in a row, because the victims mysteriously free themselves and run away if the hero travels too far from the tracks.

10

TAKE THE ULTIMATE REVENGE

The end game sees the hero tracking down Edgar Ross for a spot of sweet revenge. To do this, he needs to have a little chat with his wife. Once she's coughed up the info, she's fair game. Shoot her, tie her up, and dump her in the river, set fire to her cabin—do whatever. We lassoed her and dragged her all the way over to Ross' brother. It eased our bitterness a little. Rinse and repeat with Ross' brother. Oh, and for Ross himself, we recommend repeating the first entry in this top 10...



Dump his wife in the river.

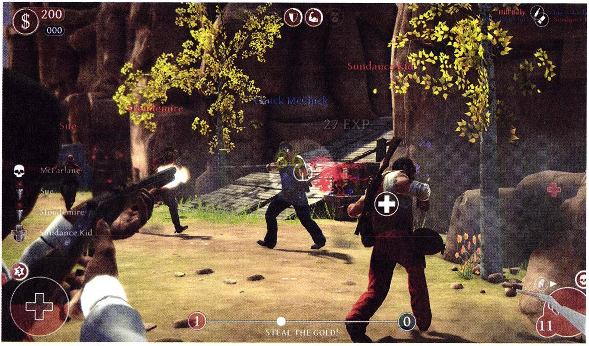
Take your revenge on Ross as Jack!

THE ONES WE DIDN'T PICK...

LET THEM EAT KATE
Remember the American Appetites side-mission near the start of the game? Just let the cannibal live and listen to his dinner's screams. Sadly, he's never seen again.

BE A BAD RANCHER
It takes skill to save the whole herd during ranching missions, but it requires real talent to complete it with as few cattle remaining as possible. Shooting the cows in the pen doesn't count.

PlayStation Network Games


200
000
Sundance Kid
Chuck McCluck
Stoudemire
Sue
27 EXP
McFarlane
Sue
Stoudemire
Sundance Kid
Hill Billy
1
STEAL THE GOLD!
0
11

Lead and Gold: Gangs of the Wild West

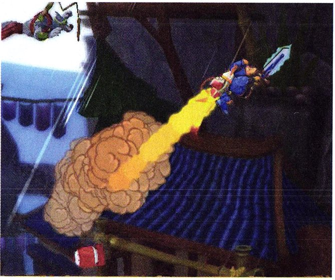
PSN **PRICE:** $14.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Paradox Interactive **DEVELOPER:** Fatshark

✚ Yes, it's got a cool Western theme, but *Lead and Gold: Gangs of the Wild West* has more going for it than endless dusty slaughter. Once we got into the swing of the teamwork-focused gunslinger action, we couldn't get enough.

The game's four character classes are straightforward but offer wide tactical variety. Gunslingers have a high rate of fire and speedily pump lead into opponents. Trappers, the game's only female character, are snipers who can lay invisible snares to trip up the opposition. Deputies paint enemy targets and wield a trusty repeater rifle. The Blaster class packs a hefty shotgun and can hurl dynamite. Each class also has a "synergy" effect that boosts the stats of nearby comrades, making them more efficient killers and ensuring that close-quarters teamwork is always sound strategy.

A broad range of play modes set across some very sprawling, slickly designed maps make for excellent showdowns. However, it's the subtleties that hooked us. After being gunned down, we didn't die immediately, but could pick off enemies from where we fell. Teammates could revive us, too, if an opponent finished us off. And we appreciated our cowboy hat being shot off our noggin while we kept on gunning.

All told, leaving adversaries lying facedown in the dust under the hot Western sun kept us mesmerized for hours. | Nathan Meunier



Rocket Knight

PSN **PRICE:** $14.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+ **PUBLISHER:** Konami **DEVELOPER:** Climax Studios

✚ Sparkster is back to save the peaceful possum kingdom of Zephyrus from air pirate invaders in this high-energy rocket-powered revival of the 16-bit *Rocket Knight* series. Short booster blasts enhance the hero's standard range of zippy combat moves and make the platforming action more entertaining. Tackling huge bosses, ping-ponging between walls, and tinkering with occasional puzzle elements kept the adventure going strong throughout the game's 14 levels. *Knight* is a bit short and a little too pricey, but it's still a good little game. | NM

PSone Fun

Can't miss classics—now available on PSN

PlayStation
N2O
Nitrous Oxide
TEEN
FOX

N$_2$O Nitrous Oxide

PSN/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Teen

This trippy tunnel-runner shooter is loaded with stare-worthy psychedelic effects.

PlayStation
Bomberman Fantasy Race
EVERYONE
Wacky Animal Racing
ATLUS

Bomberman Fantasy Race

PSN/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Everyone

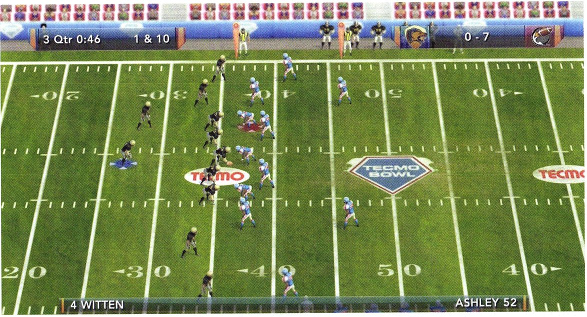
Our old pal Bomberman mounts kangaroos and other beasts in this silly kart racer.

PlayStation
DELTA FORCE
URBAN WARFARE
TEEN
NOVALOGIC

Delta Force: Urban Warfare

PSN | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Teen

Freedom doesn't come cheap in this action-packed first-person terrorist-targeted shooter.



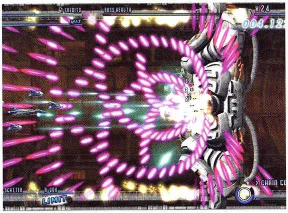
Tecmo Bowl Throwback

PSN PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Tecmo DEVELOPER: Southend Interactive

− In an age where we often have to wade through 30-minute tutorials before digging into the meat of a game, there's something refreshing about *Tecmo Bowl Throwback's* simplicity. The game hearkens back to a time when sports games were a hell of a lot less complicated than they are today; the barrier to entry is practically nil in this moderately fun update on the classic arcade style football game from the 16-bit era.

Unfortunately, in this case, simplicity is a double-edged sword. *Throwback's* gameplay is essentially unchanged from the original *Tecmo Bowl* released in the late '80s. It's great to be able to jump right into the action with simple one-button blocking and pass moves, but modern-day conventions such as the ability to swap between teammates in mid-play are sorely lacking. Additionally, there are only four running plays and four passing plays to pick from, further limiting strategic flexibility and options.

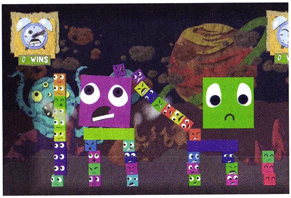
Throwback's polished, birds-eye-view visuals are punctuated by nicely done cutscenes that pop-up during key victory moments on the field. Even if it's only a novelty, we also got a kick out of swapping back and forth between the original 16-bit and new 3D graphics in real time with a quick button tap. Retro flair was enough to draw us in, but the gameplay just didn't hold our interest for very long. | NM



Soldner-X 2: Final Prototype

PSN PRICE: $12.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: EastAsiaSoft DEVELOPER: SideQuest Studios

+ Two-dimensional "bullet hell" shooters tend to be punishingly difficult and unflinchingly relentless. *Soldner-X 2* is every bit as frantic and palm-sweat inducing as its brethren, yet it's not so hard that we couldn't ease in and enjoy the chaos. Our ship was more rugged than expected, which gave time to focus on switching out weapons and blissfully plowing through a hail of bullets, swarms of enemies, and massive bosses. There's a lot more to unlock and explore beyond the short story mode in this great, old-school shooter. | NM



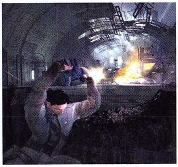
Super Stacker

PSN PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: inXile Entertainment DEVELOPER: Sparkworkz

+ This popular iPhone block-stacking puzzler gets a sweet makeover for its PSN debut. We're pleasantly surprised by the awesome transition. Stacking a predetermined array of bug-eyed blocks in teetering configurations without letting them fall is endlessly enjoyable over the course of 100 stages set against creatively designed backdrops featuring paper-cutout monsters, aliens, robots, and other assorted wackiness. The single-screen competitive and co-op multiplayer modes are a perfect addition and two new solo modes, Present Stacker and Unstacker, offer great tweaks to the formula. | NM

Play On

Must-have add-ons from the PlayStation Store



Dead To Rights: Retribution

GAC Pack

Price: $4.99 | **ESRB:** Mature

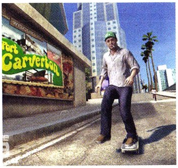
Two new modes, Assault on the 87th Precinct and Riot Control, offer more gameplay options. Explosive rounds and a noir-visual style can be toggled.

Dragon Age: Origins

Darkspawn Chronicles

Price: $4.99 | **ESRB:** Mature

It's so good to be bad. Turn the tables and change history as a darkspawn warrior hell bent on crushing the wardens and destroying Denerim.



Skate 3

Time Is Money Pack

Price: $6.99 | **ESRB:** Teen

Take the slacker route to unlocking everything in the game without the tedious legwork. We don't condone such lame-gamer behavior, but why not enjoy the fruits of zero labor?

KICK-ASS

AVAILABLE: August 3
RATED: R
GENRE: Action
STUDIO: Lionsgate / Marv Films

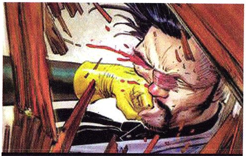
"Yeah, that's right! We're superheroes! You love us!"

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

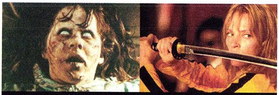
What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

Most issues it's just the PTOM crew, our PS3, and a bowl of popcorn settling down to watch our sweet digital download. But this month we had the opportunity to chat with *Kick-Ass'* writer and co-creator Mark Millar, who provided insight on the comic book's translation to film and responded to some of the criticism *Kick-Ass* has received for its extreme violence and moral ambiguity. Fans adore the story of ordinary youth who assume the role of superpowerless superheroes to battle criminals, but critics are outraged by the idea of kids who ruthlessly kill baddies without a shred of remorse. Regardless of the controversy, having Mr. Millar chat with us was like having a living, breathing Blu-ray disc extra. Superawesome.

Mark Millar on Kick-Ass



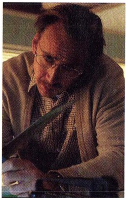
Kick-Ass' comic book sequel is arriving later this summer. Red Mist has traveled the world to learn the ways of a real supervillain—changing his name to The MotherF... (Well, like much of *Kick-Ass'* dialogue we can't actually print it.) Dave "Kick-Ass" Lizewski, meanwhile, is joining a real superhero team.



Millar agrees with Roger Ebert's statement about *Kick-Ass* being morally reprehensible. However, he says, "All my favorite films—*Exorcist*, the Quentin Tarantino films—are morally reprehensible."

On the movie: "It would be hard to see my work translated to the screen if I thought it was going to be bad. Luckily, I had complete control to make *Kick-Ass.*"

Okay, cosplayers, it's only a movie: Don't start getting any delusions of grandeur now, ya hear?

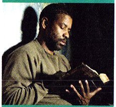


Millar couldn't initially envision Nicolas Cage as Big Daddy: "I pictured him as a really big Italian guy." Later, however, "It was impossible for me to not see him as Big Daddy."

Top VDS Downloads

MOVIES
- *The Book of Eli*
- *Shutter Island*
- *The Wolfman (Unrated)*
- *Alice in Wonderland*
- *From Paris with Love*

TV SHOWS
- *The Boondocks: Season 3*
- *Dexter: Season 4*
- *Family Guy: Season 8*
- *True Blood: Season 2*
- *Breaking Bad: Season 3*



↑ "What...the... hell? Snape kills Dumbledore? I didn't see that one coming."

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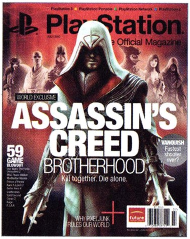
Letters


PlayStation
The Official Magazine
WORLD EXCLUSIVE
ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD
Kill together. Die alone.
59 GAME BLOWOUT
VANQUISH Fastest shooter ever?
WHY PIXELJUNK RULES OUR WORLD

▲ This month's conversation starter

DRUGS PRESCRIPTIONS
Skin Care & Nails
АПТЕКА
HOVE BEACH PHARMACY

↑ PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

Why don't all games give you the ability to replay completed missions? Take *Grand Theft Auto IV* for example: It's one of my favorite games, but if you want to play your favorite mission again, you have to completely restart the game! Most of the missions in *GTA* are fun, but my personal favorite—the "bank robbery" mission—is about 10 hours into the game. I don't want to have to play all of that again just to replay one mission! *Assassin's Creed II* is even worse, as it gives you the option to replay side-quests but not main story missions. How screwed up is that? It's not like it's incredibly difficult to give players the ability to replay missions, so why can't developers add it in? | *Eric Baxter, Parts Unknown*

Our best guess is that the developers don't want to disrupt their linear narrative by allowing players to repeatedly rob the same bank, but once the campaign's over, we don't see why we shouldn't be allowed to relive the game's highlights. Same thing with cutscenes for that matter. Get on it, developers!

PAY AS YOU GO

I was wondering if Sony would ever consider letting gamers rent downloadable games for the PSPgo. I doubt anyone has ever looked at the file size of the game demos they download, but tucked away in that info is a section that indicates when your playtime for the game will expire (and it's always blank). I was thinking Sony could make a killing if they let PSPgo owners rent games for a fee and then buy the games if they liked them. And to make retailers like GameStop happy, Sony could sell game rental cards just like the pre-paid PSN cards. This could really help break down the barriers to buying digital games. I mean, I don't want to pay $40 for a crap game and then be stuck with it because I can't even sell it back to the store. I haven't seen anyone bring up an idea like this and just wanted your take on it. (If this idea is feasible and gets implemented, I want a cut of the profits.) | *Brandon Holliday, Orlando, FL*

Is it possible? In theory, yes. But then again, so is eating an entire can of Cheez Whiz in one mouthful. That doesn't mean it's going to happen. Sony has actually hinted at a digital rental system in the past, but the last time we heard anything about it was over a year ago. So while it might still happen, we're in the same boat as you—waiting for an announcement.

GET RAY PARKER JR. ON THE HORN!

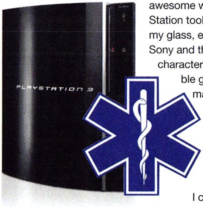
"You've made *Ghostbusters*, congrats, but I'm not satisfied. Make some more nostalgia-ish games."

LETTER OF THE MONTH

December 25, 2008, was a victorious day: The PlayStation 3 finally made its journey into my life after a year of merciless and rather impressive begging. But my story of epic gaming adventures did not start there.

I was born on October 1, 1991, precisely three months premature and weighing just two pounds. Shortly thereafter, I suffered a brain hemorrhage and, as a result, developed a minor case of cerebral palsy that left me with limited use of my right hand. For a while, my hand was stuck in fist mode—and not in that "Chuck Norris prepared for anything" kind of way. But if anyone asks how I gained the use of my hand or increased my hand-eye coordination, I reply (as does my mother for that matter): "Videogames."

Okay, so physical therapy was involved, but Mario and Donkey Kong (who didn't start with the classics?) get the credit. And it wasn't long before the wicked awesome world of PlayStation took over. So I raise my glass, er…controller to Sony and the unforgettable characters of unforgettable games. Nintendo may have *Mario Party Number Whatever*, but I just declared PlayStation medically certifiable…well, I can pretend at least. | *Kimberley Hyatt, Cold Spring, NY*



We've always believed that videogames have the power to heal, and you're living proof! After all you've been through, you deserve a Letter of the Month award and all the fame and fortune that accompanies it. (Note: Fame and fortune subject to availability.)

If it weren't for disappointment, PTOM wouldn't have any appointments. Keep us company at PTOM_letters@futureus.com

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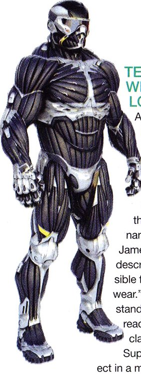


TELL OUR WIVES WE LOVE THEM

Attention PTOM: I am writing in response to the June 2010 Letter of the Month concerning the *Crysis 2* nanosuits that Dr. James Quesenberry described as "impossible for humans to wear." You can understand our alarm when reading about our classified Genetic Super Soldier Project in a magazine readily available to the public. We are dispatching agents to discuss this matter with PTOM and Dr. Quesenberry in the hopes of uncovering the source of the information. | *Nathrezim Plainsrunner, Secretary of Defense, 2023*

We were looking forward to the future until we learned it was populated by dorks. Tell the agents to bring us back some of that sweet, sweet Soylent Green.

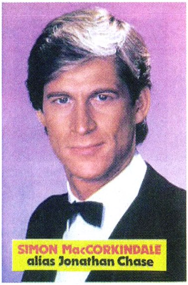
SPAM A LOT

Let me start by telling you that I love everything about my PS3 and the experiences it offers. But I hate getting spam in my PSN inbox. I get something almost every day about sending some chain letter to 35 people so that PSN can track it and give me $37 dollars, or having to forward a note to 100,000 people so PSN can remain free. Can you please address this issue so that I can definitively tell people that PSN does no such thing as track chain letters? Let's put an end to this nonsense. | *Dr8gon, Parts Unknown*

Let it be known that those intrusive, annoying chain messages are a complete lie, and if you forward this magazine to at least 35 people, those messages will disappear forever.

HOT AND HEAVY RAIN

There happen to be a lot of us lady gamers that find Leon Ockendon (Agent Jayden) from *Heavy Rain* just as hot as you guys find Miss Jacqui (Madison Paige). Any chance you could give us some eye candy as well? | *Jennifer P, Parts Unknown*



Perhaps you haven't noticed, Jennifer, but sexy beast Manimal has become a regular PTOM Letters section fixture. Here's another taste of his swoon-inducing good looks.

BECAUSE NO ONE MAKES STAR WARS GAMES

There are a lot of games that should have been great 30 some-odd years ago, but turned out to have, well, sucked. I'm mainly talking about games based on movies. Personally, I'm into '70s and '80s nostalgia—primarily films like *Back to the Future, Ghostbusters, National Lampoon's Vacation,* etc.—so I want games based on films from that era. You've made *Ghostbusters,* congrats, but I'm not satisfied. Make some more nostalgia-ish games. | *MrFusion13, Parts Unknown*

You got it, Mr. Fusion. *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo The Videogame* coming up.

CONNECT THE "DOTS"

Maybe I'm reading too far into it. Maybe it was just a coincidence. But I'm sure I saw a *World of Warcraft* reference on the cover of your June 2010 issue. Underneath the "Reviews Aplenty" title appeared the words "Dragons, Dots, Death, and Cake." While clearly intended to describe the reviews in the issue, I noticed something else. In *WoW,* more specifically one encounter, you fight Onyxia (a dragon). During the fight, you and your group must apply the maximum amount of Damage Over Time (DOT) spells. When she finally dies (death), you get what used to be some of the best loot in the game (cake). I salute you if this reference was intentional, and if it wasn't, feel free to call me a nerd. | *Luca, Parts Unknown*

Luca, we are delighted to take credit for any sort of ingenuity, be it real or cooked up in the mind of a very imaginative reader. So, yes, whatever you said was wholly intentional.

iPTOM ➘

Wouldn't it be awesome if PTOM created a magazine for the iPad? Yes, it would be awesome! Just imagine if you will: I'm reading through the reviews and instead of pictures surrounding the text, there are clickable vids that demonstrate gameplay, in-game graphics, and awesome plot teasers. Also, when you guys are reviewing items other than games (lets say the Astro Gaming A30 headset for instance), there could be a link to get more info or to buy that item. Not only that but I would also have all of my issues in one place on one device, so if I saw a commercial for a game and wanted to get a professional opinion, I could just pick up my device and start browsing. Just think of all of the possibilities! | *Scott DeVaughn, Tiffin, OH*

PTOM on iPad would be awesome, but would require serious resources. Plus, we still love killing trees—it's what got us into the biz in the first place! But what say you, readers? Would you like a digital PTOM?

22

Chicken pieces and waffles consumed at Roscoe's during a recent PTOM staff dinner.

3

Staff members crying at the conclusion of a *Toy Story 3* screening.

30

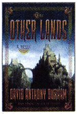
Years of Pac-Man. There's still no known cure for the devestating malady known as Pac-Man Fever.

They have the Internet on computers now!

PlayStation
Official Magazine
PRINCE OF PERSIA

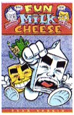
➘ Et Cetera All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

The Other Lands
Book | $28



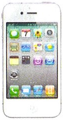
"I only read books with maps in them," Gary said about *The Other Lands.* He then babbled something about the seafaring League and the devastating quota that's seen too many Acacian children shipped off to a foreign land, but we tuned him out at that point.

Fun With Milk and Cheese
Graphic Novel | $11.95



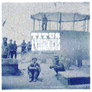
Comic book carton of hate and wedge of spite Milk and Cheese have wonderfully gory (adults only) adventures here. They're dairy products gone bad and Greg can only hope sales of their smartly done graphic novel will appease them.

iPhone 4 | Gadget
$199 (16GB); $299 (32GB)



Roger loves his current iPhone 3G, but he's got a serious case of tech-lust for Apple's new iPhone 4. He's already got his upgrade rationalization prepared: "I need the longer battery life 'cause the kids keep borrowing my phone to play games." Yes, he's doin' it for his kids.

The Monitor | Album
$8 on Amazon



With sprawling eight-minute tracks, a huge rock 'n' roll presence, and countless catchy guitar hooks and vocal melodies, *The Monitor*—the recently released album from New Jersey natives Titus Andronicus—took Scott's iPod by storm this month. Check it out!

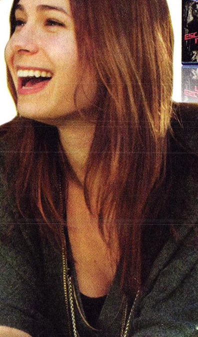
Qore Episode 27

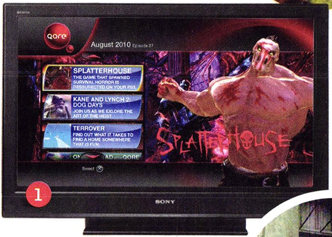
Ka-Ching! It's a PS3 Payday!

Presented by the PlayStation®Network

As is well documented on our show, I'm not a huge fan of the survival horror genre. Something about terrifying things lurking in the darkness, waiting to jump out and eviscerate me, doesn't scream "Fun!" Luckily, *Splatterhouse* is a little more straightforward! There's still a ton of gore, but you're giving as much as you're getting. For the weaker-stomached among us, you may want to skip to our *Kane & Lynch 2* segment, or get totally *kawaii* with *TerRover* and more from our trip to Japan! Enjoy! **—Veronica Belmont**

Qore is available for purchase from the PlayStation Network for $2.99 an episode, or $24.99 for a 13-episode subscription. Subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.





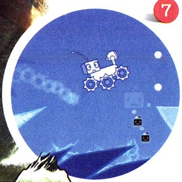
August 2010 Episode 27

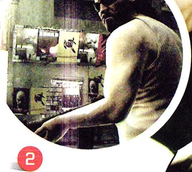
SPLATTERHOUSE
THE GAME THAT SPAWNED SURVIVAL HORROR IS RESSURECTED ON YOUR PS3.

KANE AND LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS
JOIN US AS WE EXLORE THE ART OF THE HEIST

TERROVER
FIND OUT WHAT IT TAKES TO FIND A HOME SOMEWHERE THAT IS FUN.

Select





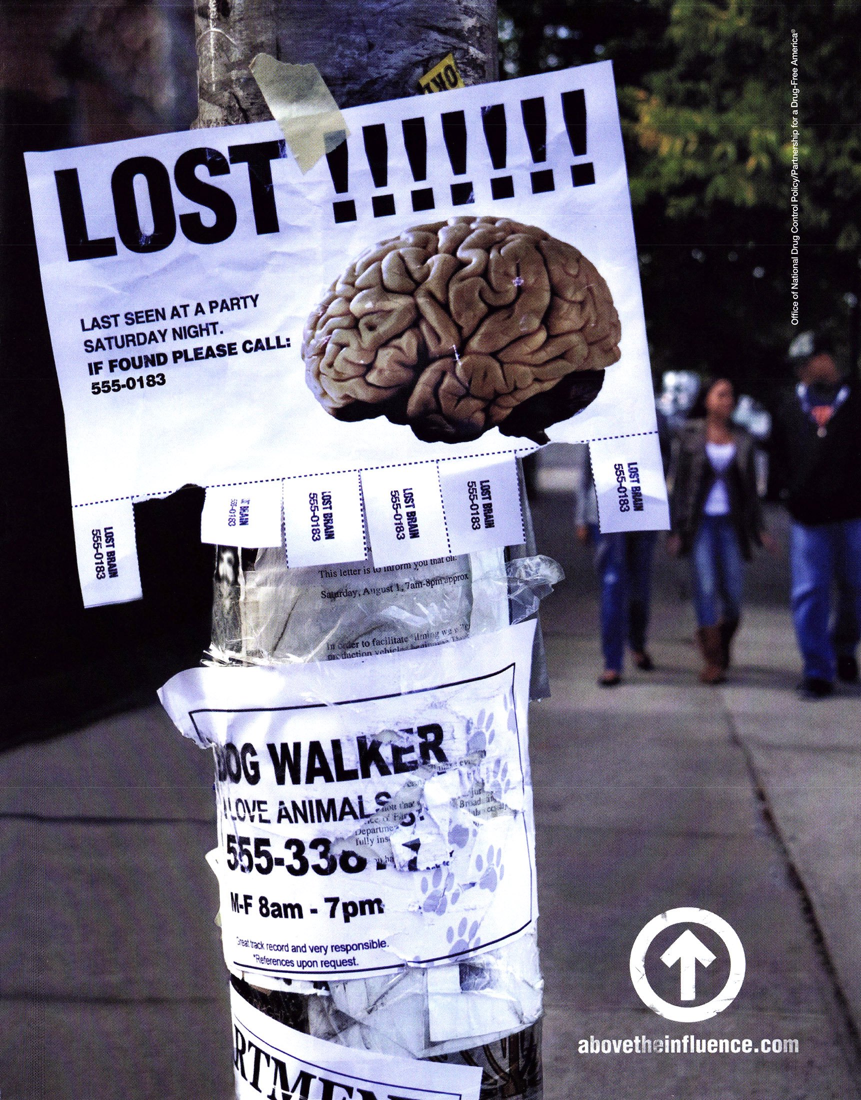
1 *Splatterhouse* in Qore. 2 *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days.* 3 Qore's host, Veronica Belmont. 4 On the Road With Qore: Kyoto. 5 Kyoto International Manga Museum. 6 Upcoming Blu-ray movies and games. 7 *TerRover.* 8 Rick and the Terror Mask from *Splatterhouse.*

Available August 10!

Download on the PlayStation™ Network.

PlayStation®Network

*Content subject to change.


LOST !!!!!!!
LAST SEEN AT A PARTY SATURDAY NIGHT.
IF FOUND PLEASE CALL:
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LOST BRAIN 555-0183
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This letter is to inform you that on
Saturday, August 1, 7am-8pm approx
In order to facilitate filming
production vehicles
DOG WALKER
LOVE ANIMALS
555-338
M-F 8am - 7pm
Great track record and very responsible.
*References upon request.
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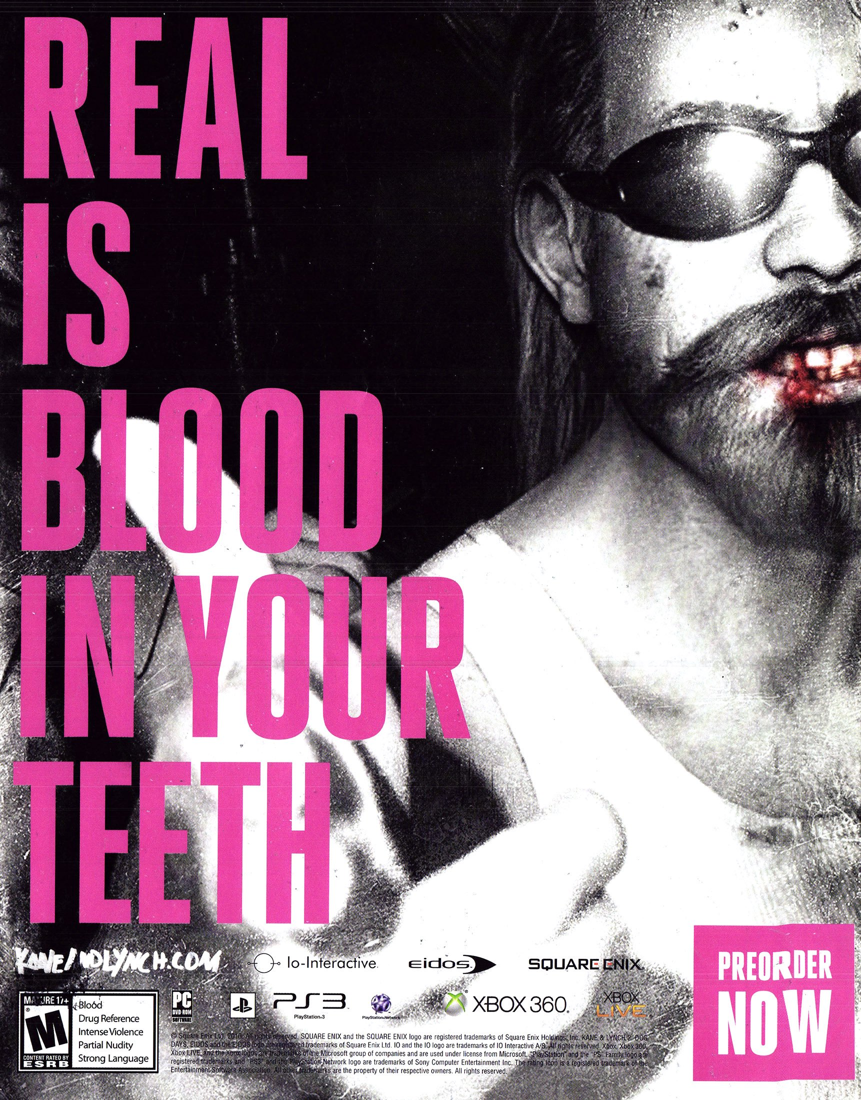
Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America®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